Commentary
November 2008

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Books in Review
Andrew Ferguson • Robert Satloff • Joshua Muravchik
Kevin J. Madigan • Clifford D. May

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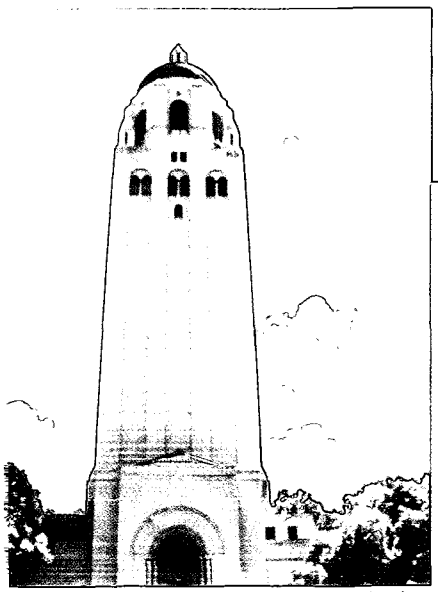

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Commentary
November 2008

Letters from Readers

The Long War

To the Editor:

Arthur Herman's apology for the Iraq project ignores the real problem, which was not so much going to war as having no idea what to do after toppling Saddam Hussein ["Why Iraq Was Inevitable," July-August]. If we had not alienated our allies in the run-up to the invasion, we might have been able to secure international support and a UN mandate. This would have greatly aided the reconstruction and lessened the burden on American troops.

Matthew Huntington
Rochester, Minnesota

To the Editor:

Arthur Herman's article is just another right-wing revisionist attempt at post-hoc justification of the war in Iraq. In truth, the only thing "inevitable" about the war was that its advocates would stubbornly defend their position against a preponderance of evidence that it was imprudent.

Perhaps the most egregious line of argument in Mr. Herman's article concerns the widely misunderstood Oil-for-Food program, which was initiated through UN resolutions in 1995 (not in 1996, as he states). In fact, Oil-for-Food achieved its core mission of providing humanitarian relief to 27 million Iraqis. Average caloric intake rose by 83 percent, while malnutrition rates in much of the country were cut in half. Enough medicine and vaccines were imported to eradicate polio and drastically reduce other communicable diseases like cholera, malaria, measles, mumps, meningitis, and tuberculosis. The capacity to conduct major surgeries increased by 40 percent in the center and south of Iraq. Some 76,500 mines were cleared.

While there was clearly corruption in the program's management and implementation, details of every contract were known to the national authorities of each supplier and to the members of the Security Council committee that held oversight power. In the end, the buck passed through Western governments and corporations, and they did not stop it.

John Lawrence
Stamford, Connecticut

To the Editor:

The most troubling point of Arthur Herman's article is his statement that George Bush would not have been re-elected in 2004 if he had not initiated the Iraq invasion. This sounds like another way of saying that Bush enhanced his campaign effort by going to war.

Michael Caffrey
Chicago, Illinois

To the Editor:

Arthur Herman's article is a powerful blow against the Iraq-war revisionists. One could add to his citations of broad bipartisan sentiment about the menace posed by Saddam Hussein. Here is Secretary of State Madeline Albright in 1998: "We must stop Saddam from ever again jeopardizing the stability and security of his neighbors with weapons of mass destruction." Here is President Clinton in the same year: "If Saddam rejects peace and we have to use force, our purpose is clear. We want to seriously diminish the threat posed by Iraq's weapons-of-mass-destruction program."

Given this unambiguous record, it is troubling that Democrats have silently watched and have in some cases led scurrilous attacks against President Bush for carrying out the action against Saddam that so many of them advocated before Bush came into office and before September 11. Nakedly disingenuous partisan politics weakens our nation at a time when we need to be united to combat the threat from radical Islam.

Warren A. Manison
Potomac, Maryland

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ARTHUR HERMAN writes:

I do not know what Matthew Huntington would have had the Bush administration do to secure more international backing for the Iraq invasion. We did in fact have the support of numerous allies, and as for the UN, it was clear from the start to anyone with eyes to see that the Russians and the Chinese would block our efforts there, for reasons that are less than noble.

John Lawrence is right that Oil-for-Food was voted into being in 1995, but 1996 was when the memorandum implementing the program was signed. Saddam Hussein's intransigent games caused the delay, and I would remind Mr. Lawrence that Saddam's refusal to comply with UN resolutions about his weapons of mass destruction triggered the sanctions that made the program necessary in the first place.

I have no reason to doubt Mr. Lawrence's statistics about what Oil-for-Food achieved, but there is also ample testimony to the fact that under the program, Saddam appropriated vast wealth and resources for himself at the expense of needy Iraqis. "I could not believe," remarked Former Dutch ambassador Peter Van Walsum, who headed the UN sanctions committee from 1999 to 2000, "that a government would deliberately exacerbate the suffering of its own people."

Saddam also oppressed and murdered Iraqis for more than a quarter-century; attacked Iran in 1980 and invaded Kuwait in 1991; launched the nuclear program that brought him under international scrutiny; and evaded weapons inspections for years. It is sad, therefore, when one sees the "blame" for the Iraq war assigned to those who finally confronted Saddam—especially, as Warren A. Manison notes, when the accusers include former stalwarts.

In a nice instance of the paranoid style, Michael Caffrey sees (or suggests that I see) George Bush's invasion of Iraq as electioneering by other means. What I meant of course was that while an American President could perhaps have afforded to be philosophical about Saddam before 9/11, to have stood down after that day was a recipe for a failed presidency.

Faith Healing

TO THE EDITOR:

As a Conservative/Masorti Jew who tries to integrate tradition with change, idealism with reality, and the prophetic tradition with the rabbinic one, I largely agree with Hillel Halkin's warnings about the unfettered idealism that is often articulated in the name of the Jewish value of "*tikkun olam*" or repairing the world ["How Not to Repair the World," July-August]. Jews cannot ignore the needs of fellow Jews—if only because, as another Hillel said long ago, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" At the same time, the Jewish imperative to safeguard the public interest has always been balanced by the imperative to help create a better world.

There is, to be sure, an element of self interest even in the latter. As the Talmud says, "We support the poor among non-Jews along with the Jewish poor for the sake of peace." Now, as then, Jews are not viewed positively in much of the world; a March 2007 BBC poll of 28,000 people in 27 countries ranked Israel as the country with the most negative influence in the world (followed by Iran and the U.S.). Beyond this, however, the prophetic tradition insists on altruism for its own sake.

As I point out in my book, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam* (2005), the term "*tikkun olam*" has had a variety of meanings throughout Jewish history. They include but are not limited to the three that Mr. Halkin mentions—the Mishnah's pragmatism, the liturgy's vision of God's majesty, and Lurianic Kabbalah's spiritualism. Contrary to what he suggests, however, the modern usage of the term to denote social action was not Michael Lerner's creation in the 1980's; as far as I can tell, it was Leonard Fein who first suggested it in the 50's, and the Reform movement used it widely in its civil-rights campaigns of the 60's. Moreover, this usage did not invent a new mandate; the Bible and the rabbis just used other words for it—"*tzedek*" (justice) and "*gemilut hasadim*" (acts of loyalty or loving-kindness).

I would demur from three of Mr. Halkin's specific claims, two substantive and one methodological. He writes: "It is possible to let homosexuals marry and raise children like heterosexuals—but only by making heterosexuals wonder what is the point of marrying and raising children." This is just silly. For one thing, married couples in the United States enjoy over 500 federal and state rights that unmarried couples do not have. This is part of the reason that gays and lesbians have pushed so hard for legal recognition of their own unions. In any case, heterosexual couples know full well why they want to get married and have children, and an increasing number of them support the efforts of homosexuals to enjoy the same kind of personal fulfillment and social confirmation.

Next, Mr. Halkin says that "[i]t is possible not to go to war—but only by condemning the people of Iraq to life under a barbaric and aggressive dictatorship." Well, no one disputes that Saddam Hussein was an evil man, but the United States should intervene in another country only when its own security is threatened. There were no weapons of mass destruction and no al-Qaeda cells in Iraq under Saddam. Bush's adventure there has diverted critical resources from the fight against America's real enemies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the detriment of the U.S., Israel, and the civilized world.

Finally, although Mr. Halkin is right that it is methodologically unsound to make large claims about the Jewish tradition on the basis of a single concept or a few lines of text, the reverse—being excessively cautious and literal—can also be a distortion. The rabbis knew that to remain relevant and vital, the tradition would need to be extended and applied in every generation. In that sense, seeing social activism as a means toward repairing the world is not as untraditional as all that.

RABBI ELLIOT DORFF
University of Judaism
Los Angeles, California

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Does the free market corrode moral character?

To the contrary.

I can attest from personal experience that, if you try to talk about the free market on today's university campuses, you will be buried in an avalanche of criticism of globalization. The opposition of faculty and students to the expansion of international markets stems largely from a sense of altruism. It proceeds from their concern about social and moral issues. Simply put, they believe that globalization lacks a human face. I take an opposite view. Globalization, I would argue, leads not only to the creation and spread of wealth but to ethical outcomes and to better moral character among its participants.

Many critics believe that globalization sets back social and ethical agendas, such as the reduction of child labor and poverty in poor countries and the promotion of gender equality and environmental protection everywhere. Yet, when I examined these and other issues in my book, *In Defense of Globalization*, I found that the actual outcomes were the opposite of those feared...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jagdish Bhagwati is University Professor of economics and law at Columbia University, senior fellow for international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the author of In Defense of Globalization. *He writes widely on public policy and international trade.*

Of course it does.

Competition in the market puts people under great pressure to break the ordinary rules of decent conduct and then to produce good reasons for doing so. It is these rationalizations — the endless self-deception necessary to meet the bottom line and still feel okay about it — that corrode moral character. But this isn't in itself an argument against the free market. Think about the ways that democratic politics also corrodes moral character. Competition for political power puts people under great pressure — to shout lies at public meetings, to make promises they can't keep, to take money from shady characters, to compromise principles that shouldn't be compromised. All this has to be defended somehow, and moral character doesn't survive the defense — at least, it doesn't survive intact. But these obvious flaws don't constitute an argument against democracy...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Walzer is professor emeritus in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He is a contributing editor of the New Republic, *co-editor of* Dissent, *and the author, most recently, of* Thinking Politically.

Certainly. Or does it?

It is clear that the ferocious competition of interests and passions, the mad rule of money, and materialism as the measure of all things — in short, the free market, released from all rules and governed only by the greed of the most powerful — fatally corrodes our souls. This is what the great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn thought at the end of his life.

This view was shared by the family of French thinkers of the 1930's called the "non-conformists," which included Charles Péguy and a few others. They saw commodity exchange as a source of depersonalization. It was also the thesis of an entire group of Christian (or simply spiritualist) thinkers who saw in the idea of the "free market" the death of moral values and the end of man's faith and aspiration to the absolute.

It was also — and this should put us on alert — one of the main themes of fascism and one of the reasons the masses were seduced by it. "Stop materialism!" it was proclaimed...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, the French philosopher, has written more than thirty books, including the New York Times *bestseller* American Vertigo *(2006) and, most recently,* Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism *(2008), both published by Random House.*

Not at all.

There is little consensus on what is moral, let alone on what corrodes morality. A man of faith measures moral character by one's ability to abide by the demands of his God. A socialist might measure moral strength by one's dedication to the redistribution of wealth. A liberal — by which I mean a classical, Adam Smith or Milton Friedman liberal, not a liberal in its American meaning of "pro-big government" — might be religious, and he might see the merits of income equality, but he will always put freedom first. This is the moral framework to which I subscribe.

According to this school of thought, freedom of the individual is the highest aim, and the ultimate test of a person's character is his ability to pursue his own chosen goals in life without infringing upon the freedom of others to pursue their own goals. From this perspective, free economic activity among individuals, corporations, and nations boosts such desirable qualities as trust, honesty, and hard work...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Born in Somalia, Ayaan Hirsi Ali emigrated in 1992 to the Netherlands, where she served as a member of parliament from 2003 to 2006. She is the author of the best-seller Infidel *and a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.*

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TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin presents a brilliant explication of the mischief wrought by contemporary Jews who invoke *tikkun olam* for their utopian projects. But he is off the mark in naming as one of the culprits the Jewish "religious Right" in its belief that "God will come to [Israel's] rescue, no matter how much it disregards the international community or deepens its entanglement with a Palestinian people from whom it needs to extricate itself."

Any difference on the Palestinian issue between Mr. Halkin and his "religious Right" need not revolve around the question of whether some utopian agenda should trump the "Jewish public interest." Rather, there is a difference of opinion over what serves that interest. Is it the agenda, backed by the "international community," to push Israel back to the 1967 armistice lines alongside an unstable and hostile state of Palestine that would pose an existential danger to Israel's survival? Or does Israel's best interest lie in the continuing—and legitimate—struggle to assure the country's future by remaining in its strategically vital biblical heartland? Unfortunately, in either scenario Israel will have to find a way to deal with the daunting challenge of a large and growing Arab presence.

Mr. Halkin concludes his essay with a fitting reference to the rabbinic sage Hillel. It was he who famously said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

JACK E. FRIEDMAN
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

A note on Hillel Halkin's fine article. The ancient term "*tikkun olam*" became a buzz phrase during the 1990's, when the Reform movement elevated it to bumper-sticker significance. My sense is that the phrase was enlisted to supplant the by-then overused term "prophetic tradition," which had long served as the watchword for the movement's progressive social and political platform.

I suspect that many devotees of progressive *tikkun olam* see the concept as Judaism's last chance in a world of (allegedly) disappearing nations and borders. Highly acculturated, uncomfortable with ritual and devotion, and troubled by the (allegedly) militaristic nationalism of the state of Israel, they seek to validate their Jewish identity through the promotion of social justice. One wonders why, unlike post-emancipation Jews like Rosa Luxemburg or Isaac Deutscher, they have not gone all the way and fully dissociated themselves from the Jewish community. It is after all a vain effort to conceive of a Judaism that has been purged of particularity.

ARDIE GELDMAN
Efrat, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

In his critique of a recent essay invoking *tikkun olam* as a precedent for progressive activism, Hillel Halkin notes the contortions that this thesis requires: interpreting a pragmatic imperative in the Talmud as a utopian one and ignoring the nature of a utopian vision in the *Aleynu* prayer (which anticipates a "new spiritual consciousness" for all mankind). I would add that the liturgy's *tikkun olam* is something that Jews pray for God, not man, to undertake.

FRED DZIADEK
Silver Spring, Maryland

Hillel Halkin writes:

Although I will take Elliot Dorff's word for it that there were attempts to popularize the concept of *tikkun olam* in the American Jewish community before Michael Lerner and the 1980's, they did not succeed enough to make me aware of them. I lived in America until 1970 and even had a certain involvement in the civil-rights movement, but I do not remember *tikkun olam* being invoked by anyone.

The Talmud is certainly wise to say that Jews must, at least sometimes, look out for others for their own good. Would Israel, however, be looked upon more kindly if, as Rabbi Dorff suggests, it listened more to the Talmud? I rather doubt it. Israeli volunteer rescue teams have repeatedly been among the first on the scene in humanitarian disasters around the globe, yet this does not seem to have made much of a difference. Anti-Israel bias goes much deeper than such actions have the power to alleviate.

When it comes to homosexual rights, I do not think it is silly to contend that the real issue is not homosexuality but heterosexuality. Should society, in one way or another, favor heterosexuality as the most desirable form of sexual behavior? Or do we want to live in a world that declares that sexual relations between men and women are in no way preferable to those between men and men, women and women, or solitary individuals and themselves? Rabbi Dorff, it would seem, does. I do not.

In any case, while Rabbi Dorff has the right to his opinion, we have the right to expect it to be consistent. Is he for "federal and state rights" for bigamists, too—and if not, why not? And how about incestuous marriages between consenting adults—why, in his opinion, should they be discriminated against? And why should a sexual relationship be a requirement at all for couples applying for tax breaks or other forms of government recognition? Why shouldn't a grandmother and her grandson who want to live together also be eligible for marriage, or two brothers or two sisters, or college roommates? It would be interesting to hear Rabbi Dorff's answers to such questions.

I would also expect Rabbi Dorff to be consistent on the issue of American intervention abroad. Inasmuch as the security of the United States was obviously not threatened by events in Bosnia and Kosovo, does he condemn America's bombing of Serb forces in those countries? Does he think the American government's decision not to bomb the Nazi death camps in World War II was the morally correct one, since the gas chambers in Auschwitz and Treblinka also did not impinge on America's security?

Jack E. Friedman's contention that Israel's religious Right is just another side to the public-policy debate over Israel's best interests does not strike me as accurate. For the most part, the religious Right in Israel has made no serious effort to explain how, demographically or politically, Israel can indefinitely retain all of the occupied territories given

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the realities of today's world, and it has repeatedly fallen back on appeals to divine promises and Jewish destiny. Without wishing to make light of God or destiny, this is not political thinking. It can no more form the basis for rational debate than can the sentiments of the *Aleynu* prayer referred to by Fred Dziadek.

I agree with Ardie Geldman wholeheartedly.

Border Dispute

TO THE EDITOR:

I am gratified that Peter Wehner approves of the "measured tone and carefully qualified assertions" of my book *The New Case Against Immigration*, and that he sees through Jason Riley's ad-hominem attacks against me in *Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders* ["Keeping Them Out, Letting Them In," July-August]. Such fair-mindedness is lamentably rare in the immigration debate. Still, Mr. Wehner comes down on the open-borders side of the argument, offering factual and sentimental reasons that I would question.

First, the facts. Mr. Wehner praises Riley's book for "excel[ling] in its analysis of the economic benefits of immigration." Well, not exactly. As Mr. Wehner notes, Riley relies on a study by the economist Giovanni Peri that purports to show how unskilled immigration actually raises the wages of unskilled natives. In fact, elementary errors in Peri's work (he counts high-school juniors and seniors as "dropouts") were exposed before Riley's book even hit the bookstores.

Relying on an earlier article in COMMENTARY by Yuval Levin and himself, Mr. Wehner attempts to debunk some of my arguments on his own, observing that "as our illegal-immigration 'problem' has become more acute, our social and civic life has become stronger." He points to improvements in such indicators as binge drinking and divorce, which have nothing to do with immigration, but ignores the very real evidence of an immigration-driven decline in labor-force participation among teenagers, persistently high welfare use among immigrant families, and an illegitimacy rate among Hispanic immigrants that is climbing faster than that among other groups.

Mr. Wehner's sentimental objection is perhaps more salient. Put simply, he argues that our nation's past success with immigration means that any reduction in the federal immigration program reflects pessimism and is necessarily "at odds with the American creed and the American story." But as they say in the investment business, past performance is no guarantee of future results. The whole point of my book is that modernity has brought about such profound changes in the way we live that past performance is simply no longer relevant.

To argue that, forever into the future, America's immigration policy must be based on the 70-odd years of mass immigration from 1848 until World War I—the only such period of mass immigration in our histo-

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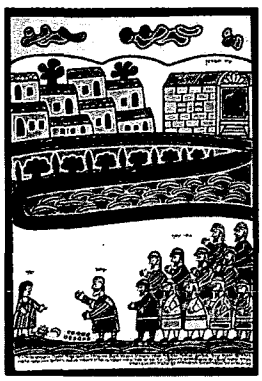

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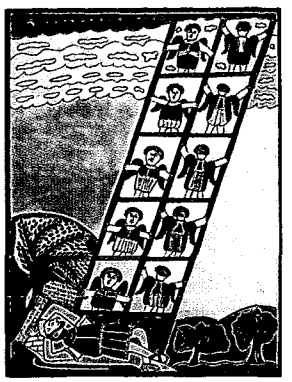

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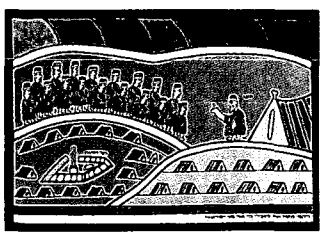

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ry—requires more than a couple of presidential quotations to justify. Is it really plausible to maintain a 19th-century approach to immigration with our welfare state, multicultural elite, and post-industrial, knowledge-based economy?

Let me end with a presidential quote more suited to our immigration deliberations than those selected by Mr. Wehner. "As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country."

MARK KRIKORIAN
Center for Immigration Studies
Washington, D.C.

PETER WEHNER writes:

I am delighted to respond to Mark Krikorian's letter. I cited Giovanni Peri's study not as a definitive piece of evidence but as a data point in the slew of studies claimed by Mr. Krikorian and Jason Riley in their back-and-forth. All of this, I remarked, "leav[es] the lay reader struggling to decide whose evidence to believe and how to adjudicate their competing interpretations." Peri and Riley can no doubt speak for themselves. But, to be fair, Riley cites many economists other than Peri to make his case, and his discussion of the economic effects of immigration covers territory beyond low-skilled workers.

I am certainly open to the argument that the presence of unskilled immigrants in the labor force modestly drives down the wages of native-born unskilled workers (an increasingly small group, as Mr. Krikorian knows). But I also concur with the judgment of the bipartisan Immigration Task Force in its 2006 report that immigration has "other, broad, positive economic effects." In either case, it does not follow that one must embrace Mr. Krikorian's policies restricting any additional influx of immigrants, legal and illegal, skilled and unskilled.

As for the relation between immigration and America's social and cultural health, I noted that over the last fifteen years, "in areas like welfare and crime, where one might think illegal immigration would have made things much worse, the improvement had the dimensions of a sea-change." Mr. Krikorian fails to mention this sentence in his letter, perhaps because he has no good response to it. If his gloom-and-doom thesis were correct, the fact that illegal immigration roughly doubled between 1995 and 2004 should have had calamitous effects on our social and cultural well-being.

Mr. Krikorian seems also to have overlooked my observation that

> [t]here is no real constituency in this country for open borders pure and simple; neither is there one for putting a stop to legal immigration altogether. A debate does rage over what to do with the millions of people who are already in the country illegally, but a broad consensus seems to have formed on the need both to prevent further illegal immigration and to rationalize the current system of legal immigration, which is an unholy mess.

In the light of this statement, I am not quite sure why Mr. Krikorian thinks my approach to immigration—I favor, among other things, securing the southern border, narrowing the scope of the family-reunification privilege to the nuclear family, adjusting upward our quotas for high-skilled labor, and making assimilation a central national priority—is a relic of the "19th century." Indeed, if anyone's approach seems tethered to previous centuries, it is Mr. Krikorian's. His call to halt legal immigration is simply the latest wave of anti-immigration sentiment that periodically washes over parts of America. Thankfully, such views rarely prevail, and their advocates are always shown to have been wrong.

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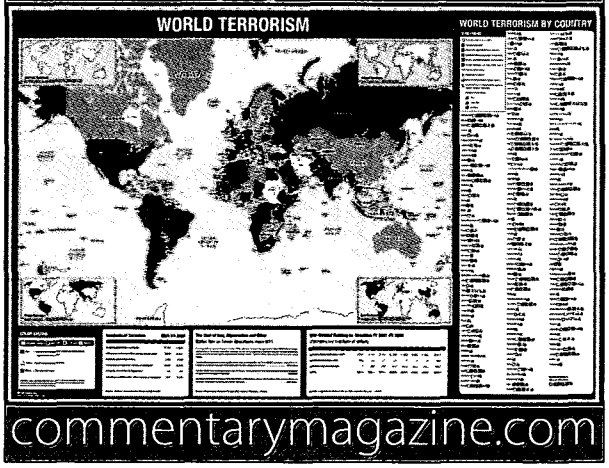

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Venezuela's Jews

TO THE EDITOR:

Travis Pantin correctly notes many of the challenges facing the Venezuelan Jewish community ["Hugo Chávez's Jewish Problem," July-August]. Since Hugo Chávez took office in 1998, relations between the community and the government have dwindled significantly. As Mr. Pantin notes, two government raids of Hebraica centers and a number of government-organized demonstrations against synagogues in Caracas have been nothing short of alarming.

After the failed coup against Chávez in 2002, accusations arose that Jews had participated in the conspiracy, and the situation deteriorated further. When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president of Iran in 2005, Chávez rushed to embrace him as an ideological brother and fellow victim of West-

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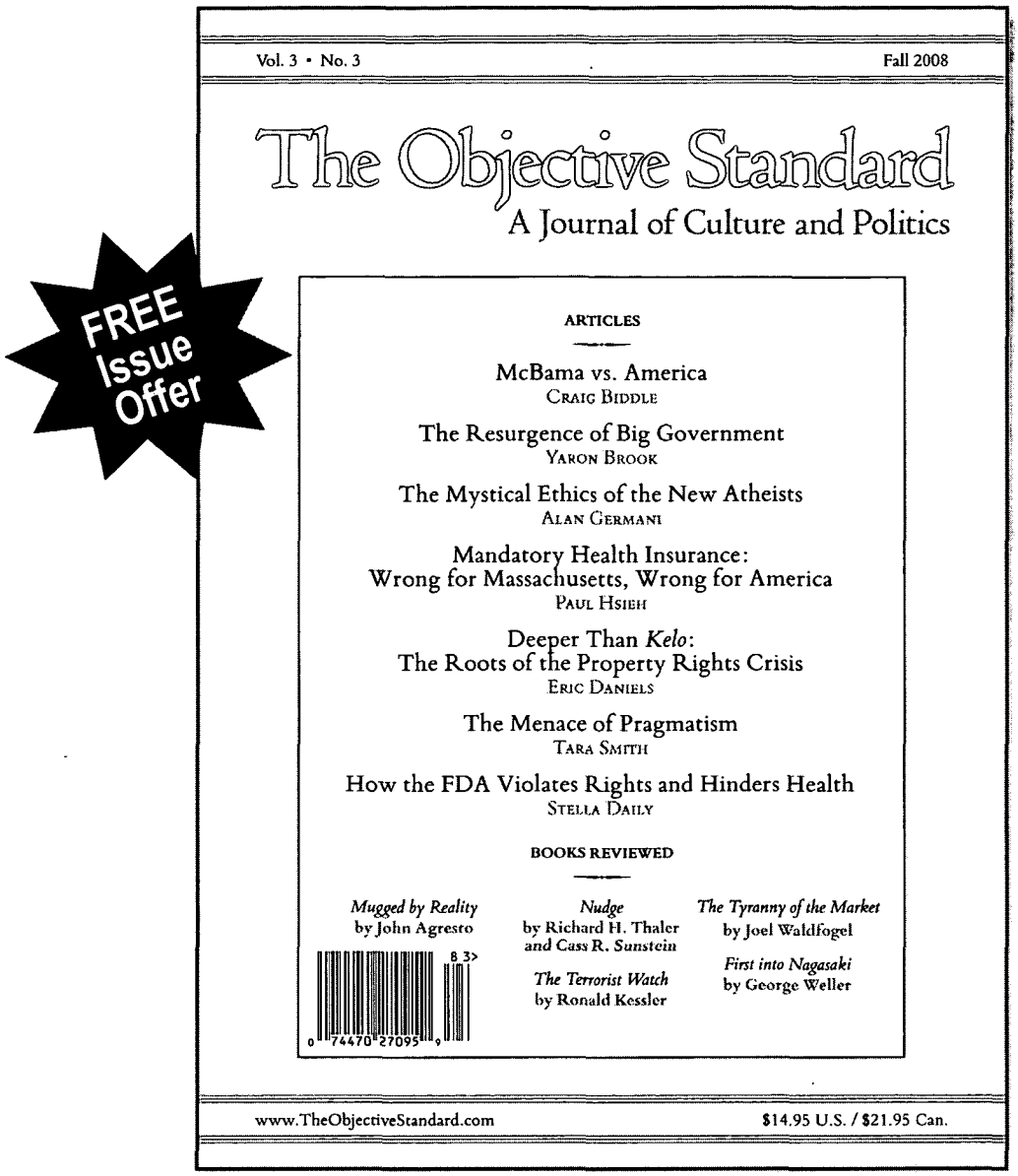

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ern imperialism. There followed a plethora of statements by Chávez against the state of Israel. Locally, ongoing government isolation and intimidation led many Venezuelan Jews to emigrate.

A breakthrough of sorts in this intolerable situation may have come this past summer. In response to overtures from the presidents of Brazil and Argentina and from Jewish organizations (including the Latin American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress), Chávez received a delegation of Jewish leaders at his presidential palace. A cordial meeting ensued in which the Jewish community was able to air its concerns, and communication lines were opened for the future.

For his part, Chávez committed himself to issuing a joint statement with his Brazilian and Argentinian counterparts condemning anti-Semitism and racism of all forms in Latin America; appointing a new ambassador to the state of Israel; and talking with Ahmadinejad to steer him away from his stance against the Jews and the state of Israel. We hope that real progress will be forthcoming. Time will tell.

JACK TERPINS
Latin American Jewish Congress
Buenos Aires, Argentina

TRAVIS PANTIN writes:

I thank Jack Terpins for his letter, and I hope that Venezuelan Jews will continue to assert their right to live in their country peacefully and unmolested. It strikes me as a good thing that the outcry against the government's gross mistreatment has been enough to prompt a meeting.

Still, one should take any commitment Hugo Chávez has made with a generous dose of salt. As is well known, the dictator is given to bombast and empty promises. If he does in fact make a concerted effort to combat anti-Semitism in Venezuela and re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel, that will certainly be for the better, but I would not hold my breath waiting. One can certainly expect exactly nothing to come of his risible promise to disabuse the president of Iran of his own rabid anti-Semitism. Venezuelan Jews would do well to remain vigilant about further encroachments on their rights and freedoms.

Tunnel Vision

TO THE EDITOR:

Emanuele Ottolenghi writes that the Seli company has sold Iran tunnel-boring equipment of the kind that can be used to construct underground bunkers for a nuclear program ["The Iranian Shell Game," July-August]. As president of Seli, I would like to correct the record. What Seli sold was not tunnel-boring equipment but auxiliary equipment like ventilators, molds, and wagons. The machinery was made specifically for the legitimate Dez hydraulic project and cannot be used in other projects. Seli sold this equipment in 2003 when there were no sanctions in place against Iran. As with all of its international contracts, the company obtained the necessary permits from the Italian authorities. The Kerman water-tunnel project to which Mr. Ottolenghi refers has been cancelled.

REMO GRANDORI
Rome, Italy

EMANUELE OTTOLENGHI writes:

Remo Grandori's reply does not fundamentally change the picture outlined in my article. First, he admits selling technology to Iran. Second, as of this writing, Seli's website still lists three separate water-tunnel projects in Iran (including Kerman). All involve a "double-shield tunnel-boring machine," which (as anyone can learn from Wikipedia) is used to get through "unstable rock strata, or where a high rate of advancement is required." Mr. Grandori's equipment is "auxiliary" to its function in about the same degree as my transmission and steering wheel are auxiliary to my car.

In recent months, Western governments have presented Seli with evidence that its trade partner in Iran is a subsidiary of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. As far as I know, the only detectable change this has prompted has been the removal of photographs of the Dez project from the company's website.

I never doubted that Seli had obtained all necessary permits for its contracts. What I pointed out was that under the weak sanctions regime now in place, advanced technology was being sold by European companies to the Revolutionary Guard. Mr. Grandori's letter confirms that something is rotten about Europe's trade policies with Iran.

Correction

Abraham Socher's review of *Dictation* by Cynthia Ozick [September] refers to a character named Frank Knight in the story "At Fumicaro." The character's name is Frank Castle. We regret the error. —ED.

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Commentary
November 2008

Speculators, Politicians, and Financial Disasters

John Steele Gordon

FUELED BY easy credit, the real-estate market had been rising swiftly for some years. Members of Congress were determined to assure the continuation of that easy credit. Suddenly, the party came to a devastating halt. Defaults multiplied, banks began to fail. Soon the economic troubles spread beyond real estate. Depression stalked the land.

The year was 1836.

The nexus of excess speculation, political mischief, and financial disaster—the same tangle that led to our present economic crisis—has been long and deep. Its nature has changed over the years as Americans have endeavored, with varying success, to learn from the mistakes of the past. But it has always been there, and the commonalities from era to era are stark and stunning. Given the recurrence of these themes over the course of three centuries, there is every reason to believe that similar calamities will beset the system as long as human nature and human action play a role in the workings of markets.

LET US begin our account of the catastrophic effects of speculative bubbles and political gamesmanship with the collapse of 1836. Thanks to a growing population, prosperity, and the advancing frontier, poorly regulated state banks had been multiplying throughout the 1830's. In those days, chartered banks issued paper money, called banknotes, backed by their reserves. From 1828 to 1836, the amount in circulation had tripled, from $48 million to $149 million. Bank loans, meanwhile, had almost quadrupled to $525 million. Many of the loans went to finance speculation in real estate.

Much of this easy-credit-induced speculation had been caused, as it happens, by President Andrew Jackson. This was a terrific irony, since Jackson, who served as President from 1829 until 1837, hated speculation, paper money, and banks. His crusade to destroy the Second Bank of the United States, an obsession that led him to withdraw all federal funds from its coffers in 1833, removed the primary source of bank discipline in the United States. Jackson had transferred those federal funds to state banks, thereby enabling their outstanding loans to swell.

The real-estate component of the crisis began to take shape in 1832, when sales by the government of land on the frontier were running about $2.5 million a year. Some of the buyers were prospective settlers, but most were speculators hoping to turn a profit by borrowing most of the money needed and waiting for swiftly-rising values to put them in the black. By 1836, annual land sales totaled $25 million; in the summer of that year, they were running at the astonishing rate of $5 million a month.

While Jackson, who was not economically so-

JOHN STEELE GORDON *is the author of, among other books,* An Empire of Wealth: The Epic Story of American Economic Power *(2004). His "Look Who's Afraid of Free Trade" appeared in the February* COMMENTARY.

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phisticated, did not grasp how his own actions had fueled the speculation, he understood perfectly well what was happening. With characteristic if ill-advised decisiveness, he moved to stop it. Since members both of Congress and of his cabinet were personally involved in the speculation, he faced fierce opposition. But in July, as soon as Congress adjourned for the year, Jackson issued an executive order known as the "specie circular." This forbade the Land Office to accept anything but gold and silver (i.e., specie) in payment for land. Jackson hoped that the move would dampen the speculation, and it did. Unfortunately, it did far more: people began to exchange their banknotes for gold and silver. As the demand for specie soared, the banks called in loans in order to stay liquid.

The result was a credit crunch. Interest rates that had been at 7 percent a year rose to 2 and even 3 percent a month. Weaker, overextended banks began to fail. Bankruptcies spread. Even several state governments found they could not roll over their debts, forcing them into default. By April 1837, a month after Jackson left the presidency, the great New York diarist Philip Hone noted that "the immense fortunes which we heard so much about in the days of speculation have melted like the snows before an April sun."

The longest depression in American history had set in. Recovery would not begin until 1843. In Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, published that same year, Ebenezer Scrooge worries that a note payable to him in three days might be as worthless as "a mere United States security."

MODERN STANDARDS preclude government officials and members of Congress from the sort of speculation that was rife in the 1830's. But today's affinities between Congressmen and lobbyists, affinities fueled by the largess of political-action committees, have produced many of the same consequences.

Consider the savings-and-loan (S&L) debacle of the 1980's. The crisis, which erupted only two decades ago but seems all but forgotten, was almost entirely the result of a failure of government to regulate effectively. And that was by design. Members of Congress put the protection of their political friends ahead of the interests of the financial system as a whole.

After the disaster of the Great Depression, three types of banks still survived—artifacts of the Democratic party's Jacksonian antipathy to powerful banks. Commercial banks offered depositors both checking and savings accounts, and made mostly commercial loans. Savings banks offered only savings accounts and specialized in commercial real-estate loans. Savings-and-loan associations ("thrifts") also offered only savings accounts; their loan portfolios were almost entirely in mortgages for single-family homes.

All this amounted, in effect, to a federally mandated cartel, coddling those already in the banking business and allowing very few new entrants. Between 1945 and 1965, the number of S&L's remained nearly constant at about 8,000, even as their assets grew more than tenfold from almost $9 billion to over $110 billion. This had something to do with the fact that the rate of interest paid on savings accounts was set by federal law at .25 percent higher than that paid by commercial banks, in order to compensate for the inability of savings banks and S&L's to offer checking accounts. Savings banks and S&L's were often called "3-6-3" institutions because they paid 3 percent on deposits, charged 6 percent on loans, and management hit the golf course at 3:00 P.M. on the dot.

These small banks were very well connected. As Democratic Senator David Pryor of Arkansas once explained:

> You got to remember that each community has a savings-and-loan; some have two; some have four, and each of them has seven or eight board members. They own the Chevy dealership and the shoe store. And when we saw these people, we said, gosh, these are the people who are building the homes for people, these are the people who represent a dream that has worked in this country.

They were also, of course, the sorts of people whose support politicians most wanted to have—people who donated campaign money and had significant political influence in their localities.

The banking situation remained stable in the two decades after World War II as the Federal Reserve was able to keep interest rates steady and inflation low. But when Lyndon Johnson tried to fund both guns (the Vietnam war) and butter (the Great Society), the cartel began to break down.

If the government's first priority had been the integrity of the banking system and the safety of deposits, the weakest banks would have been forced to merge with larger, sounder institutions. Most solvent savings banks and S&L's would then have been transmuted into commercial banks, which were required to have larger amounts of capital and reserves. And some did transmute themselves on their own. But by 1980 there were still well over 4,500 S&L's in operation, relics of an earlier time.

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WHY WAS the integrity of the banking system not the first priority? Part of the reason lay in the highly fragmented nature of the federal regulatory bureaucracy. A host of agencies—including the Comptroller of the Currency, the Federal Reserve, the FDIC and the FSLIC, state banking authorities, and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB)—oversaw the various forms of banks. Each of these agencies was more dedicated to protecting its own turf than to protecting the banking system as a whole.

Adding to the turmoil was the inflation that took off in the late 1960's. When the low interest rates that banks were permitted to pay failed to keep pace with inflation, depositors started to look elsewhere for a higher return. Many turned to money-market funds, which were regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission rather than by the various banking authorities and were not restricted in the rate of interest they could pay. Money began to flow out of savings accounts and into these new funds, in a process known to banking specialists by the sonorous term "disintermediation."

By 1980, with inflation roaring above 12 percent—the highest in the country's peacetime history—the banks were bleeding deposits at a prodigious rate. The commercial banks could cope; their deposit base was mostly in checking accounts, which paid no interest, and their lending portfolios were largely made up of short-term loans whose average interest rates could be quickly adjusted, not long-term mortgages at fixed interest. But to the savings banks and S&L's, disintermediation was a mortal threat.

Rather than taking the political heat and forcing the consolidation of the banking industry into fewer, stronger, and more diversified banks, Washington rushed to the aid of the ailing S&L's with quick fixes that virtually guaranteed future disaster. First, Congress eliminated the interest-rate caps. Banks could now pay depositors whatever rates they chose. While it was at it, Congress also raised the amount of insurance on deposits, from $40,000 to $100,000 per depositor.

At the same time, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board changed the rules on brokered deposits. Since the 1960's, brokers had been making, on behalf of their customers, multiple deposits equal to the limit on insurance. This allowed wealthy customers to possess insured bank deposits of any cumulative size—an end-run around the limit that should never have been tolerated in the first place. Realizing that these deposits were "hot money," likely to chase the highest return, the Home Loan board forbade banks to have more than five percent of their deposit base in such instruments. But in 1980 it eliminated the restriction.

With no limits on interest rates that could be paid and no risk of loss to the customers, the regulators and Congress had created an economic oxymoron: a high-yield, no-risk security. As money flowed in to take advantage of the situation, the various S&L's competed among themselves to offer higher and higher interest rates. Meanwhile, however, their loan portfolios were still in long-term home mortgages, many yielding low interest.

As a result, they went broke. In 1980 the S&L's had a collective net worth slightly over $32 billion. By December 1982 that number had shrunk to less than $4 billion.

To remedy the disaster caused by the quick fixes of 1980, more quick fixes were instituted. The FHLBB lowered reserve requirements—the amount of money that banks must keep in highly liquid form, like Treasury notes, in order to meet any demand for withdrawals—from 5 to 3 percent of deposits. "With the proverbial stroke of the pen," the journalist L.J. Davis wrote, "sick thrifts were instantly returned to a state of ruddy health, while thrifts that only a moment before had been among the dead who walk were now reclassified as merely enfeebled."

For good measure, the Bank Board changed its accounting rules, allowing the thrifts to show handsome profits when they were, in fact, going bust. It was a case of regulators authorizing the banks they regulated to cook the books. Far worse, the rule that only locals could own an S&L was eliminated. Now anyone could buy a thrift. High-rollers began to move in, delighted to be able to assume the honorific title of "banker."

And Congress, ever anxious to help the Chevy dealers and shoe-store owners, lifted the limits on what the thrifts themselves could invest in. No longer were they limited to low-interest, long-term, single-family mortgages. Now they could lend up to 70 percent of their portfolios for commercial real-estate ventures and consumer needs. In short, Congress gave the S&L's permission to become full-service banks without requiring them to hold the capital and reserves of full-service banks.

Now came the turn of state-chartered thrifts, whose managers understandably wanted to enjoy the same freedoms enjoyed by federally-chartered S&L's. State governments from Albany to Sacramento were obliging. California, which had the largest number of state-chartered S&L's, allowed them to invest in anything from junk bonds to

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start-up software companies—in effect, to become venture-capital firms using government-guaranteed money. The consequence, as predictable as the next solar eclipse, was a collapse of the S&L's en masse. Between 1985 and 1995, over a thousand were shut down by the government or forced to merge. The cost to the public is estimated to have run $160 billion.

AS THE SORRY tale of the S&L crisis suggests, the road to financial hell is sometimes paved with good intentions. There was nothing malign in attempting to keep these institutions solvent and profitable; they were of long standing, and it seemed a noble exercise to preserve them. Perhaps even more noble, and with consequences that have already proved much more threatening, was the philosophy that would eventually lead the United States into its latest financial crisis—a crisis that begins, and ends, with mortgages.

A mortgage used to stay on the books of the issuing bank until it was paid off, often twenty or thirty years later. This greatly limited the number of mortgages a bank could initiate. In 1938, as part of the New Deal, the federal government established the Federal National Mortgage Association, nicknamed Fannie Mae, to help provide liquidity to the mortgage market.

Fannie Mae purchased mortgages from initiating banks and either held them in its own portfolio or packaged them as mortgage-backed securities to sell to investors. By taking these mortgages off the books of the issuing banks, Fannie Mae allowed the latter to issue new mortgages. Being a government entity and thus backed by the full faith and credit of the United States, it was able to borrow at substantially lower interest rates, earning the money to finance its operations on the difference between the money it borrowed and the interest earned on the mortgages it held.

Together with the GI Bill of 1944, which guaranteed the mortgages issued to veterans, Fannie Mae proved a great success. The number of Americans owning their own homes climbed steadily, from fewer than 15 percent of non-farm families in the 1930's to nearly 70 percent by the 1980's. Thus did Fannie Mae and the GI Bill prove to be powerful engines for increasing the size of the middle class.

IT CAN BE argued that 70 percent is about as high a proportion as could, or should, be hoped for in home ownership. Many young people are not ready to buy a home; many old people prefer to rent. Some families move so frequently that home ownership makes no sense. Some people, like Congressman Charlie Rangel of New York, take advantage of local rent-control laws to obtain housing well below market rates, and therefore have no incentive to buy.

And some families simply lack the creditworthiness needed for a bank to be willing to lend them money, even on the security of real property. Perhaps their credit histories are too erratic; perhaps their incomes and net worth are lower than bank standards; or perhaps they lack the means to make a substantial down payment, which by reducing the amount of the mortgage can protect a bank from a downturn in the real-estate market.

But historically there was also a class, made up mostly of American blacks, for whom home ownership was out of reach. Although simple racial prejudice had long been a factor here, it was, ironically, the New Deal that institutionalized discrimination against blacks seeking mortgages. In 1935 the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in 1934 to insure home mortgages, asked the Home Owner's Loan Corporation—another New Deal agency, this one created to help prevent foreclosures—to draw up maps of residential areas according to the risk of lending in them. Affluent suburbs were outlined in blue, less desirable areas in yellow, and the least desirable in red.

The FHA used the maps to decide whether or not to insure a mortgage, which in turn caused banks to avoid the redlined neighborhoods. These tended to be in the inner city and to comprise largely black populations. As most blacks at this time were unable to buy in white neighborhoods, the effect of redlining was largely to exclude even affluent blacks from the mortgage market.

Even after the end of Jim Crow in the 1960's, the effect of redlining lingered, perhaps more out of habit than of racial prejudice. In 1977, responding to political pressure to abolish the practice, Congress finally passed the Community Reinvestment Act, requiring banks to offer credit throughout their marketing areas and rating them on their compliance. This effectively outlawed redlining.

Then, in 1995, regulations adopted by the Clinton administration took the Community Reinvestment Act to a new level. Instead of forbidding banks to discriminate against blacks and black neighborhoods, the new regulations positively forced banks to seek out such customers and areas. Without saying so, the revised law established quotas for loans to specific neighborhoods, specific income classes, and specific races. It also encouraged

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community groups to monitor compliance and allowed them to receive fees for marketing loans to target groups.

But the aggressive pursuit of an end to redlining also required the active participation of Fannie Mae, and thereby hangs a tale. Back in 1968, the Johnson administration had decided to "adjust" the federal books by taking Fannie Mae off the budget and establishing it as a "Government Sponsored Enterprise" (GSE). But while it was theoretically now an independent corporation, Fannie Mae did not have to adhere to the same rules regarding capitalization and oversight that bound most financial institutions. And in 1970 still another GSE was created, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or Freddie Mac, to expand further the secondary market in mortgage-backed securities.

This represented a huge moral hazard. The two institutions were supposedly independent of the government and owned by their stockholders. But it was widely assumed that there was an implicit government guarantee of both Fannie and Freddie's solvency and of the vast amounts of mortgage-based securities they issued. This assumption was by no means unreasonable. Fannie and Freddie were known to enjoy lower capitalization requirements than other financial institutions and to be held to a much less demanding regulatory regime. If the United States government had no worries about potential failure, why should the market?

Forward again to the Clinton changes in 1995. As part of them, Fannie and Freddie were now permitted to invest up to 40 times their capital in mortgages; banks, by contrast, were limited to only ten times their capital. Put briefly, in order to increase the number of mortgages Fannie and Freddie could underwrite, the federal government allowed them to become grossly undercapitalized—that is, grossly to reduce their one source of insurance against failure. The risk of a mammoth failure was then greatly augmented by the sheer number of mortgages given out in the country.

That was bad enough; then came politics to make it much worse. Fannie and Freddie quickly evolved into two of the largest financial institutions on the planet, with assets and liabilities in the trillions. But unlike other large, profit-seeking financial institutions, they were headquartered in Washington, D.C., and were political to their fingertips. Their management and boards tended to come from the political world, not the business world. And some were corrupt: the management of Fannie Mae manipulated the books in order to trigger executive bonuses worth tens of millions of dollars, and Freddie Mac was found in 2003 to have understated earnings by almost $5 billion.

Both companies, moreover, made generous political contributions, especially to those members of Congress who sat on oversight committees. Their charitable foundations could be counted on to kick in to causes that Congressmen and Senators deemed worthy. Many of the political contributions were illegal: in 2006, Freddie was fined $3.8 million—a record amount—for improper election activity.

By 2007, Fannie and Freddie owned about half of the $12 trillion in outstanding mortgages, an unprecedented concentration of debt—and of risk. Much of the debt was concentrated in the class of sub-prime mortgages that had proliferated after the 1995 regulations. These were mortgages given to people of questionable credit standing, in one of the attempts by the federal government to increase home ownership among the less well-to-do.

Since banks knew they could offload these sub-prime mortgages to Fannie and Freddie, they had no reason to be careful about issuing them. As for the firms that bought the mortgage-based securities issued by Fannie and Freddie, they thought they could rely on the government's implicit guarantee. AIG, the world's largest insurance firm, was happy to insure vast quantities of these securities against default; it must have seemed like insuring against the sun rising in the West.

Wall Street, politicians, and the press all acted as though one of the iron laws of economics, as unrepealable as Newton's law of universal gravity, had been set aside. That law, simply put, is that potential reward always equals potential risk. In the real world, unfortunately, a high-yield, no-risk investment cannot exist.

In 2006, after an astonishing and unsustainable climb in home values, the inevitable correction set in. By mid-2007, many sub-prime mortgages were backed by real estate that was now of lesser value than the amount of debt. As the market started to doubt the soundness of these mortgages, their value and even their salability began to deteriorate. So did the securities backed by them. Companies that had heavily invested in sub-prime mortgages saw their stock prices and their net worth erode sharply. This caused other companies to avoid lending them money. Credit markets began to tighten sharply as greed in the marketplace was replaced by fear.

A vicious downward spiral ensued. Bear Stearns, the smallest investment bank on Wall Street, was forced into a merger in March with JPMorgan

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Chase, with guarantees from the Federal Reserve. Fannie and Freddie were taken over by the government in early September; Merrill Lynch sold itself to Bank of America; AIG had to be bailed out by the government to the tune of $85 billion; Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy; Washington Mutual became the biggest bank failure in American history and was taken over by JPMorgan Chase; to avoid failure, Wachovia, the sixth largest bank in the country, was taken over by Wells Fargo. The most creditworthy institutions saw interest rates climb to unprecedented levels—even for overnight loans of bank reserves, which are the foundation of the high-functioning capitalist system of the West. Finally it became clear that only a systemic intervention by the government would stem the growing panic and allow credit markets to begin to function normally again.

MANY PEOPLE, especially liberal politicians, have blamed the disaster on the deregulation of the last 30 years. But they do so in order to avoid the blame's falling where it should—squarely on their own shoulders. For the same politicians now loudly proclaiming that deregulation caused the problem are the ones who fought tooth and nail to prevent increased regulation of Fannie and Freddie—the source of so much political money, their mother's milk.

To be sure, there is more than enough blame to go around. Forgetting the lessons of the past, Wall Street acted as though the only direction that markets and prices could move was up. Credit agencies like Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch gave high ratings to securities that, in retrospect, they clearly did not understand. The news media did not even try to investigate the often complex economics behind the housing market.

But remaining at the heart of the financial beast now abroad in the world are Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and the mortgages they bought and turned into securities. Protected by their political patrons, they were allowed to pile up colossal debt on an inadequate capital base and to escape much of the regulatory oversight and rules to which other financial institutions are subject. Had they been treated as the potential risks to financial stability they were from the beginning, the housing bubble could not have grown so large and the pain that is now accompanying its end would not have hurt so much.

Herbert Hoover famously remarked that "the trouble with capitalism is capitalists. They're too greedy." That is true. But another and equal trouble with capitalism is politicians. Like the rest of us, they are made of all-too-human clay and can be easily blinded to reality by naked self-interest, at a cost we are only now beginning to fathom.

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Liberals and the Surge: Wrong From the Beginning

Peter Wehner

In early January 2007, 71 percent of Americans said the Iraq war was going moderately badly to very badly. Indeed, the war had been unpopular for much of the previous years, at times deeply so. But by this past September, a nationwide Pew survey found "a striking rise in public optimism about the situation in Iraq." According to the poll, 58 percent of Americans now believe the war in Iraq is going well or very well, and the same percentage now also say that the U.S. will definitely or probably succeed in Iraq.

This news is encouraging—and not terribly surprising. After all, most Americans have assessed the situation in Iraq based on a reasonable interpretation of events on the ground. And since the January 2007 announcement of the "surge"—President Bush's decision to deploy 30,000 additional troops to Iraq, armed with a fundamentally new counterinsurgency strategy—the situation on the ground has, by every conceivable measure, improved. In some cases, the progress has been stunning.

And yet, no matter what most American believe or what reality tells us is so, leading liberal observers and politicians, long in the vanguard of opposition to the war, have denounced the surge at every point. Even as some, in the face of overwhelming evidence, have been forced to concede a modicum of American progress, they have done so reluctantly and have downplayed the role played by administration policy in achieving that progress. Others have denied that significant progress has been made at all.

Why they have responded in this way is a question worth exploring. But first it may be useful to establish the record.

The formal inauguration of the surge in January 2007—in announcing it, the President said it would "change America's course in Iraq, and help us succeed in the fight against terror"—was met by liberal commentators with a skepticism bordering on derision.

Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post* mocked Bush's "fantasy-based escalation . . . which could only make sense in some parallel universe where pigs fly and fish commute on bicycles." At *Time*, Joe Klein ridiculed "Bush's futile pipe dream." Jonathan Chait, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, found "something genuinely bizarre" about those Americans who actually supported the new strategy. "It is not just that they are wrong. . . . It's that they are completely detached from reality." The *New Republic*'s Peter Beinart predicted that, by 2008, American soldiers would "still be dying, and the catastrophe will still be deepening." In sending more troops to Baghdad, Beinart wrote, "Bush is showing his commitment to win—except that the United States has already lost."

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Liberal politicians were just as certain that the surge was a doomed and irresponsible policy. On the night of the announcement, Senator Barack Obama proclaimed: "I am not persuaded that 20,000 additional troops in Iraq are going to solve the sectarian violence there. In fact, I think it will do the reverse." Later in the month, Senator Joseph Biden declared: "If he surges another 20, 30 [thousand], or whatever number he's going to, into Baghdad, it'll be a tragic mistake." Senator Hillary Clinton similarly insisted that "I cannot support [the] proposed escalation of the war in Iraq," while Senator John Kerry said that sending in additional troops was not an "answer" but "a tragic mistake."

Throughout the spring, even though the full complement of additional troops had yet to arrive in Iraq, the drumbeat of opposition continued, and so did intimations of American defeat. To Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post*, "the [American] lives lost in Iraq were wasted." Former Ambassador Peter Galbraith, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, argued that Bush had embraced a plan that "has no chance of actually working. At this late stage, 21,500 additional troops cannot make a difference." On Capitol Hill, Senator Christopher Dodd asserted that "there is no military solution in Iraq. To insist upon a surge is wrong." Senate majority leader Harry Reid declared that "this surge is not accomplishing anything" and in April announced flatly that the Iraq war was "lost."

TWO MONTHS later, liberal critics of the war remained of the same mind, and were now demanding that we quit the field altogether. According to a July 8 *New York Times* editorial, the time had come "for the United States to leave Iraq, without any more delay than the Pentagon needs to organize an orderly exit." (This, despite the paper's acknowledgment in the same editorial that an American pullout was likely to yield "further ethnic cleansing, even genocide," not to mention regional chaos and more terrorism.) James Fallows of the *Atlantic*, a sharp critic of the surge from the outset, wrote that the expectations "being heaped" on it were "simply laughable."

In August, Michael Ignatieff, formerly of Harvard and now deputy leader of Canada's Liberal party, took to the pages of the *New York Times Magazine* with a *mea culpa* titled "Getting Iraq Wrong: What the War Has Taught Me About Political Judgment." Ignatieff wrote:

> The unfolding catastrophe in Iraq has condemned the political judgment of a President. But it has also condemned the judgment of many others, myself included, who as commentators supported the [2003] invasion. Many of us believed, as an Iraqi exile friend told me the night the war started, that it was the only chance the members of his generation would have to live in freedom in their own country. How distant a dream that now seems.

In fact, however, far from having turned into an "unfolding catastrophe," the dream was already getting closer to realization. By the summer of 2007, although Iraq was still in many ways a broken nation, evidence was mounting that the surge *was* working. In almost no time, sectarian violence had been sharply decreased in Baghdad, and the provinces of Anbar and Diyala were being reclaimed. Coalition forces were making huge headway in human intelligence, and Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was on the run.

In September, a full report on the situation was delivered by David Petraeus, the military architect of the surge and the new commanding general in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq. Both men had traveled to Washington to provide two days of congressional testimony.

Petraeus and Crocker reported that civilian Iraqi deaths in all categories had declined by more than 45 percent since the height of sectarian violence the previous December. During the same period, the number of overall ethno-sectarian deaths had decreased by more than half in the country as a whole, and by about 70 percent in Baghdad. In Anbar province, thanks in large part to the turn against AQI by local Anbaris, car bombings and suicide attacks had declined in each of the previous five months. Likewise, the number of areas in which AQI enjoyed sanctuary had been considerably reduced. Even the political front showed advances, with heartening early signs of a bottom-up reconciliation of hitherto warring Iraqi factions.

While both Petraeus and Crocker were careful not to overstate the degree of progress in Iraq, and reminded everyone who would listen that the country remained a fragile place, they left no doubt of their belief that, in the words of Crocker, "a secure, stable, democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbors is attainable."

But none of this mattered to the administration's liberal critics, who to their earlier prognosis of failure were now adding charges of government cooking of the evidence. Even before the Petraeus-Crocker testimony, Senator Dick Durbin, the Democratic majority whip, warned Americans that "by carefully manipulating the statistics, the Bush-Petraeus report will try to persuade us that violence

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in Iraq is decreasing and thus the surge is working." After the hearing, Representative Edward Markey of Massachusetts said the general's testimony was "just a façade to hide from view the continuing failure of the Bush administration's strategy." To Representative Rahm Emanuel, the general's written report deserved to win "the Nobel Prize for creative statistics or the Pulitzer for fiction."

Paul Krugman, an influential columnist for the *New York Times*, could not have agreed more. The administration, he flatly asserted, was intentionally misleading the public by "creating the perception that the 'surge' is succeeding, even though there's not a shred of verifiable evidence to suggest that it is." Others were even more reckless. A Democratic Senator complained to the website *Politico* that no one was willing to call Petraeus "a liar on national TV," hoping instead that "outside groups will do this for us." As if in response, MoveOn.org, the left-wing political-action committee, promptly took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* proposing, in giant type, a new name for General Petraeus: "General Betray Us."

IN NOVEMBER 2007, two months *after* Petraeus and Crocker testified, Barack Obama was still arguing that the surge was having the opposite effect from the one they had described: "not only have we not seen improvements, but we're actually worsening, potentially, a situation there." Representative David Obey, asked if the surge strategy was working, offered the novel view that if violence was in fact decreasing, it might be because the insurgents were "running out of people to kill."

True, such palterings were becoming a little harder to sustain. The *Washington Post*, for one, was ready to conclude in a mid-November editorial that "the 'surge' of U.S. military forces in Iraq this year has been, in purely military terms, a remarkable success." And not only in military terms: "Markets in Baghdad are reopening, and the curfew is being eased; the huge refugee flow out of the country has begun to reverse itself." By the end of 2007, there was no question that Iraq, which a year earlier had been on the brink of implosion, was now on the mend. Attacks against citizens in Baghdad had dropped by almost 80 percent since November 2006, murders in Baghdad province had decreased by 90 percent, and roadside bombings had declined by approximately 70 percent. In the Dura market in southern Baghdad, where fewer than a handful of shops had been open in January 2007 there were now 500 in operation. As Joseph Fil, commanding general of the multinational division in Baghdad, reported, "many Iraqis now can shop without fearing for their lives."

Nevertheless, in a January 2008 debate, the leading contenders for the Democratic nomination—Obama, Clinton, and John Edwards—still refused to reassess their stance on the surge. Instead, they silently dropped the subject in favor of re-emphasizing their commitment to withdraw all combat troops from Iraq and their unchanged opposition to the presence of any permanent bases there.

Others were not quite so ready to abandon their conviction that the surge itself had failed, even if that meant moving the goalposts on the definition of success. In February, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, questioned on her unbending insistence that American troops must begin an immediate and massive withdrawal from Iraq, was asked by the CNN correspondent Wolf Blitzer: "Are you not worried that all the gains that have been achieved over the past year might be lost?" Pelosi replied: "There haven't been gains, Wolf. The gains have not produced the desired effect, which is the reconciliation of Iraq. This is a failure. This is a failure." In the *Washington Post*, the writer Michael Kinsley rang an inventive change on the same motif: the surge was a failure, he reasoned, because even though violence was down, and even though political progress was being made, the number of American troops was still roughly where it was when the surge was announced—as if the achievements produced by those troops were somehow disconnected from their presence.

In early April of this year, Petraeus and Crocker made a return appearance on Capitol Hill. By then, some liberal politicians were reluctantly conceding security gains, but insisted they were evanescent and therefore unimportant—"very nice to have," in the words of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, "but essentially . . . meaningless." To the columnist E.J. Dionne, Jr., the problem now was that "the administration and its supporters talk incessantly about winning but offer no strategy for victory." In doing so, he continued, they "resemble their own parody of liberal do-gooders insisting on continuing flawed and foolish programs no matter how obvious it becomes that their efforts are doing more harm than good."

MORE HARM than good? In his April testimony, while stipulating that "the situation in certain areas is still unsatisfactory and innumerable challenges remain," Petraeus presented an avalanche of statistics illustrating the degree to which "security in Iraq is better than it was when

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Ambassador Crocker and I reported to you last September, and . . . significantly better than it was 15 months ago when Iraq was on the brink of civil war and the decision was made to deploy additional U.S. forces to Iraq." To which Crocker added:

> Last September, I said that the cumulative trajectory of political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq was upward, although the slope of that line was not steep. Developments over the last seven months have strengthened my sense of a positive trend.

Which did not stop Barack Obama from taking to the op-ed page of the *New York Times* two months later to insist that "the same factors that led me to oppose the surge still hold true." A week later, ABC's Terry Moran asked Obama if, knowing what he knew now, would he support it? Obama's answer was "No." That is, he was still against the surge despite his own belated acknowledgment that it had, in fact, "succeeded beyond our wildest dreams." In the effort to reconcile this blatant contradiction—akin to a diagnostician's continuing to oppose the treatment that made the patient well—he twisted himself into an intellectual pretzel, asserting that the decrease in violence was the result not of any new American strategy but of "political factors inside Iraq that came right at the same time." A similar counterfactual claim would later be made by Bob Woodward in his new book *The War Within* and by Peter Galbraith in the *New York Review*. In Galbraith's summary judgment, "less violence . . . is not the same thing as success," and in any case the surge "has not been the main reason for the decline in violence."

And so it goes. By the time General Petraeus handed over the flag of his command to General Raymond Odierno in September, the situation in Iraq had been utterly transformed. Not only had overall violence in Iraq declined to almost "normal" levels,* and not only were Iraqi security forces growing in numbers and effectiveness as threats from al-Qaeda and Shiite militias decreased, but Iraq's political leaders had also reached comprehensive domestic accommodations, passing key laws in the areas of provincial elections, the distribution of resources, amnesty, pensions, investment, and de-Baathification. Also in September, Iraq's parliament passed a crucial election law that, according to a story in the *New York Times*, "represents a significant achievement for a country that has more often resorted to violence than political negotiation in resolving its differences."

Petraeus once described Iraq as "hard but not hopeless." Today, he says Iraq is "hard but hopeful." That statement would seem beyond dispute.

Not, however, to the war's liberal critics.

THOSE CRITICS, in the piercing phrase of Senator Joseph Lieberman, "hear no progress in Iraq, see no progress in Iraq, and most of all, speak of no progress in Iraq." So hermetically sealed off from reality are they that even Charles Peters, the founder of the liberal *Washington Monthly*, was driven to write as long ago as last December:

> I have been troubled by the reluctance of my fellow liberals to acknowledge the progress made in Iraq in the last six months, a reluctance I am embarrassed to admit that I have shared. . . . [T]he fact is that the situation in Iraq, though some violence persists, is much improved since the summer. Why do liberals not want to face this fact, let alone ponder its implications?

Why, indeed? And, if reluctant in December 2007, why are most still reluctant today?

A generous interpretation is that by the end of 2006, many liberals had made a definitive good-faith judgment that the Iraq war was irretrievably lost. This then became the filter through which they viewed all later developments. Once convinced of the impossibility of substantial progress, never mind a decent outcome or an actual victory, they could not help receiving good news as anomalous and/or inherently unsustainable.

But the generous interpretation may be too generous, and also condescending. Reasonable and responsible adults are expected to assess the solidity of their convictions against the available evidence and in light of changing circumstances. Even at the time of the surge's announcement, when things were going quite badly, should responsible adults not have been able to entertain the possibility that, given the enormity of what was at stake in the war, a fundamentally new approach merited at least a *degree* of support, however hesitant or conditional?

Instead, many pronounced the new approach a failure even before it was tried. Still worse was that they continued to pronounce it a failure even as the evidence began to amass that it was succeeding. Even those few who (like Richard Cohen and Joe Klein) eventually admitted they were wrong about

* According to the quarterly report submitted to Congress by the Department of Defense in September, "security incidents" in Iraq are at levels not seen since early 2004. Across Iraq, civilian deaths have declined by 77 percent since the same period in 2007, and ethno-sectarian-related deaths by 96 percent. Eleven of Iraq's eighteen provinces are now under local Iraqi control.

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the surge itself continued to insist they were right about the war. Others stuck more and more zealously to their original position the more it became falsified by reality. *They*, and not the President, were the ones who were truly "doubling down" on their bet—as if a decent outcome in Iraq threatened their entire worldview.

Nor was their blindness limited to the good news occurring in the lives of Iraqis. They seemed no less blind to the huge drop in American combat deaths. Those deaths, after all, had been said to be among the core concerns of the anti-surge critics, who along with their allies in the media had been focusing relentless attention on the numbers of American casualties in Iraq. Yet little was now made of the fact that—to take just one example—there were but five U.S. combat deaths in Iraq in July 2008. (The previous monthly low had been eight in May 2003, after the invasion.)

Nor, finally, has much if anything been made of the fact that coalition forces have drawn down significantly. All five of the U.S. combat brigades committed to the surge, as well as two Marine battalions and the Marine Expeditionary Unit, have withdrawn. One could not ask for a clearer sign that the surge has been achieving one of the key declared objectives of the anti-war critics themselves—namely, a reduction of American combat troops in Iraq. It is a sign that remains, for the critics, all but unnoticed.

ENTER, IGNOMINIOUSLY, politics. For some liberals, hatred of the President was clearly so all-encompassing that they had developed a deep investment in the failure of what they habitually dismissed not as America's war but as "Bush's war." To an extent, this passion was driven by merely partisan considerations: Iraq had become a superbly effective instrument with which to bludgeon Republicans. It had helped the Democrats take control of both the House and the Senate in 2006; might not a thorough "Republican" defeat in Iraq lastingly reshape the political landscape in their favor?

This is, admittedly, an unpleasant line of speculation, and those foolhardy enough to venture upon it have been loudly condemned for questioning the patriotism of their political adversaries. But patriotism is not the issue—judgment is. When politicians acting in good faith misjudge a situation, nothing prevents them from acknowledging their error and explaining themselves. For the most part, we await such acknowledgments in vain.

In partial extenuation, it might be contended that politicians have an elementary obligation to be responsive to the opinions of their constituents; since Iraq had become a certifiably unpopular cause, stepping out of line on the issue was likely to be regarded as an offense punishable at the polls. But what, then, are we to say of the opinion shapers, the editorial writers of our great newspapers, the essayists and columnists and book authors who, unconstrained by petty interest, present themselves as stalwartly independent spirits willing to follow the truth wherever it may lead? What was at work in *them* when the evidence of American progress—which started as a trickle, and then became a river, and eventually became a flood—could no longer be denied? For not only did they continue to deny it, but they actively promoted an alternative policy of withdrawal and retreat that would have made an American defeat, and a jihadist and Iranian victory, inevitable. Is it not fair to say that what was at work in them was an ideological antipathy not just to an American President, but to America's cause?

Fortunately, as I noted at the outset, Americans at large are not so ready to deny the evidence of their senses, and appear open to reasoned argument on the basis of that evidence. For a political leader in high office, this is a great blessing. Some eyes will refuse to open and some ears will refuse to hear and some voices will always be raised high in derision. To act rightly in such circumstances is difficult and often enormously costly; but it is the very essence of leadership. If a leader's decision is wise, there are grounds for hoping that in time this wisdom will be vindicated and, perhaps, recognized—even in the case of a war once massively unpopular but now winnable.

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A Descent in the Dark

R.R. Reno

In memory of Alex: I never believed you would die.

I LOOKED UP as the sun struck the summits. The tops of the French Alps blazed, and the lifeless gray sky of the hour before dawn was suddenly, miraculously, vibrantly blue. Soon light was cascading down the mountainsides, and the blocky forms of granite on the ridges nearby surfaced like submarines, streaming up and out of the early morning semi-darkness. The avalanche of daylight swept past. In just a few minutes light swallowed the darkness in the valley below.

Colin and I were making our way down the long slope of ice that formed the bottom portion of the mountain face we had been unhappily descending all night long. With each deliberate step we stabbed the ice with the long, sharp picks of our ice axes, kicking in the front points of the metal-spiked crampons strapped to our heavy boots. With frequent glances over our shoulders to keep us on target, we were aiming slightly left, toward what seemed the least difficult way to get off the steep mountain face.

Now the ice slope ended abruptly. We had arrived at the edge of the *bergschrund*, the appropriately harsh-sounding German word that climbers use to describe the often large moat or crevasse (*Schrund*) near the base of the mountain (*Berg*) where the glacier fanning out below pulls away from the ice face that soars above.

"This sucker looks huge," Colin groaned as he gingerly peered over the edge. I silently shook my head with the gesture of a no that really meant a reluctant yes. Colin busied himself setting up an anchor, preparing what I hoped was our final rappel—a fittingly pleasant-sounding French term for recalling or returning oneself to the bottom by sliding down a rope fixed in place. "A reflexive verb," I thought distractedly as I organized the rope. "*Je me rappelle à la sûreté*—I recall myself to safety." I suddenly had a reassuring vision of my remote, serene, and confident self reaching out to bring my all-too-present, tired, and worry-battered self down the final stage of the descent.

My daydream ended as I looked up. Our traversing descent had put us underneath large, hanging ice cliffs suspended below the summit, thousands of feet above. The morning sun bathed the surrounding mountains. The distant, snowy edges of the ice cliffs above us were brilliantly white in the fresh light. After long hours of darkness, the world was charged with life. My mind was drifting again, this time in a less pleasant direction. I thought for a moment about the coming heat of a sun-filled day—and of the cliffs melting, giving way, and sweeping down the face to engulf us. After having spent the entire night cold and lost in darkness, praying for dawn and then welcoming it, I now cursed its triumph.

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I took off my gloves to fiddle with the gear and attach myself to the rope to descend. The thin prongs of the crampons rasped in the hard early morning snow as I edged into position. Aware that exhaustion was making it difficult for me to focus, I checked and rechecked the attachment of my descending device to the rope. It seemed to me that the ice cliffs far above creaked. Perhaps my mind was playing tricks. The glacier below moaned like a despairing prisoner kept in the deepest dungeon of a distant fortress. A quite real chunk of ice broke free a couple of hundred feet to our right and dropped with a roar into the gaping moat below. Mountains awakened by warmth always get up on the wrong side of bed.

As I leaned out and went over the edge I could see into the dark depths of the *bergschrund*. It was filled with the debris of ice blocks that had avalanched from above. After a few feet, I looked up to Colin and said, "Goddammit, the rope doesn't make it to the bottom. We'll have to set up an anchor and make another rappel." Then down I went.

In the middle of the vertical ice face, dangling at the end of the rope, I twisted in our last ice screw to serve as an anchor. We had very little gear left of any sort; our unplanned, ill-considered descent had required us to leave a great deal behind as we engineered our way down the face. Once secured, I detached myself from the rope and barked up to Colin, "Off rappel." Hanging from the single screw, waiting for Colin to join me, I stared at an invitingly flat spot on the glacier below. We were close now to safety, very close.

Colin and I met at Yale in 1984. He was a first-year medical student, and I had just begun graduate study. Friends of friends of friends somehow put us in touch. During the next couple of years we went climbing on the local crags, drank beer at Archie Moore's bar on Willow Street, and spent hours talking about bigger mountains, bigger routes, and bigger adventures. It's a wonderful thing to spend a clear, cool fall day rock climbing in New England, and we had many good days. But it's something else entirely to leave the car behind and set out for thousands of feet of climbing across complex terrain to the top of a remote summit.

Climbers use a term from romantic life to describe the difference: commitment. At the local crag, if you get tired in the early afternoon or if storm clouds threaten, then you can call it quits and head home for an early beer. On a big climb it's not so simple. The commitment is not just a matter of size and difficulty. In the mountains, weather, glaciers, and rock fall create a dangerous environment. Climbers need to move quickly, not only in order to complete a long climb in a reasonable period of time but more importantly to minimize exposure to danger. Speed equals safety, and serious mountain climbers need to be decisive, bold, and confident. There's no time for extra safety precautions.

The element of commitment is what makes for adventure. You set for yourself an objective that cannot easily be attained—and one in which failure will bring a great deal of suffering—and then you kick away the obvious supports and block the ready avenues of escape. Rather than assembling a crew on a larger, safer boat, the sailor sets out solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Rather than the sunny, gentle ridge to the summit, the mountaineer chooses the dark, dangerous north face.

These choices are mysterious, but I don't think they are unfamiliar. The term *adventurer* was first used to describe the soldier of fortune, the man who entertains the dangers of battle not in order to defend his homeland or fulfill his duty, not even for the sake of conquest and booty, but to live as one who risks death. He takes his chances. He romances *Fortuna*, confident that his skill with the sword will carry him through.

To a great extent, this basic meaning of adventure has remained constant, even as the range of activities we think of as adventuresome has expanded far beyond the exploits of d'Artagnan and his comrades. That is why mountain climbing or solo sailing or extreme skiing is not at all like the thrill-seeking of bungee jumping, or simply a matter of collecting summits. Anybody who has drunk enough beer can strap on a bungee harness and throw himself off a bridge; once you jump, the rest is just an exercise in screaming and letting the carnival-like mechanism do its work. As for summits, you can drive up Pike's Peak or take a helicopter to the top of the Grand Teton. Serious climbing is about getting to the top by a route that tests your competence with difficulty—and your will with danger.

A true adventurer is not foolhardy. He must realistically assess his capabilities and choose reasonable objectives. The sailor looks at himself and weighs his skills, and only then decides that he can cross the Atlantic in a smaller boat. The climber takes an inventory of his experience and judges himself capable of more remote peaks by more difficult routes. But as soon as the next step is taken, the margin of safety decreases. Bad weather, bad decisions, bad luck—all these factors crowd in more and more closely against competence and determination. That's why the best adventures involve a

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strange combination of emotions: a strong expectation of success in concert with all sorts of doubts and worries about the consequences of failure.

During long hours driving to and from climbing areas in the rattling cab of Colin's old Toyota pickup, we seemed always to talk about commitment. Perhaps half-aware that we were coddled Americans to whom so much came so easily, we wanted difficulty. Young and healthy, we lacked the wisdom to know that life itself would offer us plenty in due time. So, between our self-ignorance and our partial self-knowledge, a general idea took shape. It might have been on the way back from the Shawangunks in New York on a May weekend in 1986. I can't remember for sure. But sometime that spring we made a plan: August in the Alps before school started again after Labor Day.

THE FIRST leg of our trip was a grueling marathon of travel. We flew from New York to Zurich on a Tower Air charter plane packed with American students in sub-economy seating designed to extract in pain every dollar saved on airfare. But we had young backs and knees, and a striking ability to endure the state of exhausted semi-consciousness that comes after staying awake all night. After arrival, wanting to save every possible Swiss franc, we immediately loaded ourselves and our gear onto a speedy train to Geneva, where we toiled through town with our packs and bags in the mid-afternoon heat to get to a suburban station. With still two more changes we zigged our way south, zagged west, and then clanked slowly up to Chamonix at the base of Mount Blanc.

We established ourselves in a European-style campground, with more than a hundred tents pitched side by side in a small field. Two English fellows, Dave and John, were set up next to us. Their ropes and gear told us they were climbers, and soon enough we learned they had spent the previous two weeks climbing rock routes on the west-facing flanks of the nearby Aiguille de Blaitière. "Great routes, mate," Dave reported, "and the brilliant thing is that the midway station of the Midi *téléphérique* takes you practically to base. The whole thing's right there. And you can get down quickly if the weather goes bad, which seems to be happening more often than not lately."

Colin and I could see the appeal, but a good night's sleep restored us to our full ambition. For us, the destination was obvious: the Argentière basin, a few miles up the valley and in the heart of the French Alps. On the south side of the Argentière glacier the summits line up in a closely spaced row: first the Aiguille de Triolet, then the Courtes, the Droites, and finally the Aiguille Verte anchoring the western end. Their 4,000-foot north-facing sides are draped with ice from top to bottom, making this compact, two-mile long chain one of the most important places in the history of modern mountaineering. The steeper faces were first climbed in the 1960's; in 1970, Reinhold Messner opened up a new era of fast, bold ascents when he soloed the north face of the Droites. Even in the mid-80's the more difficult routes remained a testing ground for aspiring alpinists who wanted to get to the top of the game.

We spent a cloudy day lazing around Chamonix, with John and Dave showing us the best place to buy bread and pastries. The morning that followed was cloudless and inviting. We rushed around town buying a few days' worth of food, loaded our packs, and left our extra gear in safekeeping with our new English friends. Then we walked quickly into Chamonix to take the train for the short ride up the valley to Argentière. Enjoying the scenery, we tore the grease-stained bag out of Colin's pack and ate the six *pain au chocolat* we had bought with the foolish idea that we would make them last a day or two.

In the Café Mont Blanc, which sits across from the tiny train station in the village of Argentière, I ordered my third double cappuccino of the day. While I was waiting for it to arrive, Colin gently raised the issue that, in retrospect, was to define our experience. "What," he asked, "do you think we ought to do about guidebooks?" Ever the medical student, Colin was not inclined to ignore the obvious. "Route descriptions might come in handy," he observed.

A great deal of climbing involves an almost gymnastic skill in using hands, arms, and legs to move upward efficiently. But there are complicated and important technical aspects as well. All the high-tech gear for mountain climbers has been developed in order to minimize risk. The lightweight nylon ropes and slings tied with special knots, along with an array of metal pitons, carabiners, chocks, and cams are designed to provide safety against a possible fall. The ice axe and crampons allow for safe movement over slippery snow and ice. The down-filled sleeping bags, Gore-Tex jackets, and synthetic clothing protect against extreme weather. Our packs were full of the stuff. Guidebooks are simply another aid. They describe the routes, provide pictures from many angles, and give advice about how best to approach the bases and descend from the summits.

The waiter brought my coffee. As I lifted the

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cup, I enjoyed the view. The mountains surrounding us were spectacular monoliths of granite. But almost immediately I felt strangely demoralized, as I often do at the beginnings of climbing trips. Well-equipped, well-trained, attended to by the technological achievements of modern society, the climber can make big mountains smaller simply by piling up sureties against failure. The warm milk foam caressed my lips. What had seemed such a grand adventure through all our planning and preparation was now threatened by a perhaps caffeine-fractured judgment that everything was going to be too easy, too straightforward. "I didn't cross the Atlantic," I said to myself in a haughty, self-important tone, "in order to be a marathoner, treating routes as well-marked courses, and the summits as finish lines."

So I waved aside Colin's suggestion. "We won't need a guidebook," I asserted with an affected nonchalance. Gesturing broadly to the range of mountains before us, I said, "These are look-and-do mountains."

Colin knew my game, and perhaps silently shared my fear that our trip would be a failure because it would lack commitment. We weren't in Alaska or the Himalayas, where just the remoteness and the weather and the sheer size of the mountains generate a great deal of uncertainty. The French Alps are beautiful, but they are hardly remote. Everything seemed so convenient, so close to civilization's protective embrace. He gave his own long look at the mountains, and then laughed and said, "Alright."

After a few hours of hiking we arrived at the Argentière climbers' hut, which is anything but a hut. A large, modular building, it looked as though it could accommodate a hundred people, which apparently it does during the winter months when it serves as the first stop on a popular week-long ski tour from Chamonix to Zermatt. From tables on the long front deck that overlooks the Argentière glacier there is an intimate view of all the north faces we had come to climb. But before we arrived, the clouds had settled in, and we could see only the *bergschrunds* at the bases of the mountains across the way. The faces remained hidden, still hypothetical.

With my high-school French I tried to explain our plans to the hut keeper. His face darkened, and he rushed off. A few minutes later, translator in tow, he returned with a sheaf of hand-drawn diagrams of new rock climbs on the south-facing cliffs just above the hut. For the next few minutes we were subjected to a litany of warnings about the horrible dangers of the north faces, alternating with a list of the virtues of the recently pioneered rock routes. "The ice is very bad this year." "There is a beautiful VIIa finger-crack just behind the hut." "Last week two Swiss had to be rescued off the Courtes." "The Arête du Genepy gets the sun all day long." "Weather has been unsettled all week." "There are excellent short routes only 15 minutes from the hut."

Dozens of descriptions lay on the table in front of us. Colin slowly collected the scattered pieces of paper, and then he patiently told the hut keeper—or more accurately the English-speaking fellow standing next to him—that we hadn't brought our rock-climbing shoes with us, just ice gear. Listening to the quick translation, the hut keeper gave us an extended and dramatic look of disbelief. Then he took the route descriptions from Colin, tucked them under his arm, and marched back into the building.

We hadn't planned to stay in the Argentière hut—by graduate-student standards, it was expensive. Our packs heavy with camping gear, we made our way up into some boulders as it started to drizzle. Eventually we found one large rock leaning against another: a relatively dry spot in which to sit and cook.

That night and through the next day, the light intermittent rain continued. The clouds remained low, shrouding all the surrounding peaks. We sat, cooked meals, made extra pots of pasta, invaded our cookie supply, got very bored. Another night of rain followed, and then another day. Overcome by inactivity, we decided to spend a few francs on a cup of coffee at the hut. After a couple of hours and a few unplanned but very satisfying, butter-sweating pastries, we watched out the window as a strong wind broke up the clouds that seemed to have taken up permanent residence in the Argentière basin.

By early evening the skies were clear, and we could see the famous north faces for the first time. Their top thirds were resplendently white with a fresh layer of snow. We studied them from the porch of the hut and discussed our options. "Maybe," I ventured as I took in their magnitude, "we should do something fairly straightforward first. Then, if the weather holds, we can turn to something more severe, like the north face of the Droites." We both agreed that the Couturier Couloir on the Aiguille Verte looked like the perfect warm-up route. It began as a moderate, sweeping snow slope that steepened toward the top, where the white of snow gave way to the light gray of alpine ice.

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As we arranged our gear, Colin suggested that we might get some information about possible descents off the Verte. "We'll figure it out," I reassured him. "Besides," I said, "this will give our warm-up a little extra edge." I ventured the same rationale for refusing to take a second rope, extra food, or more gear. Colin raised no protest, and we turned our attention to a pot of rice richly flavored with butter, cheese, and pieces of French ham edged with a delicious crust of oven-hardened fat.

THE DAY dawned perfection and the Couturier Couloir went quickly and without difficulty. We congratulated ourselves on our speed and efficiency. "We're definitely ready for the harder routes," Colin said as we began to make our way across the narrow snow ridge that connects the top of the north face to the main summit of the Aiguille Verte. "The Droites day after tomorrow," I replied, "or maybe even tomorrow if we get off this route as quickly as we climbed it." But our banter turned to silence as a dense cloud engulfed us, cutting off all visibility. By the time we reached the top of the mountain, we were trying to force our eyes to see through the mist so that we could decide which of the gullies and slopes leading off the summit would take us down to safety.

We spotted a mass of nylon slings looped over a solid-looking pillar of rock—the certain sign of a frequently used fixed anchor for a descent. Since I had dismissed both a guidebook and the counsel of the hut keeper, I was forced back on vague ideas. "I'll bet that's the regular route," I guessed (correctly, it turns out). "We could go that way, but it takes us down the wrong side of the mountain. We'll end up on the Mère de Glace, and the only way back to our gear tonight will be to take the cog railway down to Chamonix, then the train back up to the village of Argentière, and then the *téléphérique* up to the Grand Montets and the hike across the Argentière glacier."

We had yet to learn that this complicated (and expensive) way of navigating though the French Alps was precisely what is required, not just for this route but for nearly all the others as well. I had wrongly balked at what seemed to me an absurdly complex and involved way to end an otherwise perfect day of mountaineering. In retrospect, moreover, I can see that I was unconsciously making another serious mental mistake. Because we didn't have a guidebook, we didn't really know where the gulley below led. I bent this uncertainty in a convenient direction. Our success that morning had tempted me to think about a grander route tomorrow, which in turn required a quick and easy descent to give us adequate time for preparation.

We dithered for a few minutes, hoping the clouds would disperse at least long enough for us to see down. They didn't. Then I said to Colin, "You know, I have a definite memory of seeing a poster of the Verte in the climbing shop in Chamonix. I'm pretty sure that there's an easy glissade down the west side. From there we can work our way directly back to the Argentière glacier without any trouble. Let's try going down that way."

On the basis of my handy but false memory we began to descend the snow that sloped gently to the west. I was buoyed. The going was easy. But after a few minutes the slope got steeper, and at one point the clouds thinned enough for us to see that the snow dropped off below us. So we trended rightward a bit. The clouds thickened. We hit a series of deep fractures that broke the snow slope into huge blocks of disjointed ice. Eventually we dropped into one of the shallower crevasses and made our way down toward what turned out to be the edge of the summit glacier. It ended abruptly at the top of a sheer rock face.

Colin and I took counsel. We couldn't see more than 100 feet down the face. Perhaps we should try to go back up to the summit? We should have, but at the moment it seemed as though we had already come down a long way, and the thought of returning was tiresome. Also, I remained convinced that an easy descent lay below. So we decided to start rappelling.

We were very wrong. As Colin joined me at the end of our third or fourth rappel, the clouds gave us an opening. We could briefly see the terrain below. It was not pretty. Although the base of the face was still obscured, we now knew that about 2,000 feet of steep rock and ice lay beneath us. Colin graciously made no mention of the picture I supposedly remembered.

There was no real possibility of returning up the rock down which we had come. Continuing our descent into the difficult terrain below was the only option. Although we didn't know it (after all, we had no guidebook to consult), we were committed to going down the Nant Blanc face, a difficult route to ascend, unpopular because of its reputation for dangerous conditions, and certainly not one we would have wittingly chosen to go down.

WE WOULD need to make still more rappels. The process involves doubling the rope through a fixed anchor. Climbers slide down the rope, controlling their descent by a friction device,

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and then they recover the rope by pulling one end down while the other snakes up and through the fixed anchor. Since we were in the middle of a face nobody descends, we needed to make our own anchors by looping a piece of nylon sling over a rock outcrop, or by placing a piton or metal chock in a fissure in the rock. After we pulled down the rope, those anchors above would remain unrecoverable. We had only a handful of nylon slings and a dozen or so pieces of rock gear, and the thought of the many rappels below made me fear our supply would be soon exhausted.

As we collected ourselves and I began counting our now precious nylon slings, a tremendous crash shook the face. Completely forgetting about the gear, I focused all of my mental energy on willing my entire body into my helmet. The summit cap of permanent ice above had just shed a sliver of its bulk over the edge of the face. Ice blocks thundered down about 40 feet to our left, covering us with fine crystals.

Throwing the still unknown number of slings over my head, I began traversing to a prominent rock rib on our right. Before I could think straight, I had moved 30 feet away from Colin and was clutching loose rocks and screaming, "Put me on belay!" The next volley of ice drowned out Colin's reply, giving me a Captain America adrenaline punch that quickly sent me still another 30 feet over and onto easier ground.

The rock rib put us out of immediate danger; if more ice fell down the face, it would tend toward the shallow gullies on either side. We regained our composure and began slowing climbing down the narrow spine of rock, belaying each other rather than setting up rappels and using up our limited supply of gear. "To belay" is another of those exotic words that climbers use—an old English nautical term for wrapping or cleating ropes to secure sails. A belayed climber can still fall, but the gear that has been fastened into the irregularities of the rock, along with the rope tied to his waist and then snapped through the carabiners attached to the emplaced gear, will limit the distance and serious injury. It's slower than rappelling, but since each climber is belayed as he descends, relying on the rope only for safety, all the gear can be collected by the second climber who follows the first, and thus reused later.

After long hours of down-climbing, dusk darkened to night. We reached a snow-covered ledge. We were physically tired and mentally exhausted. "Why don't we stop here and wait out the night," I suggested to Colin. He agreed, and in silence we tried to find someplace secure and comfortable to sit.

Back at the Café Mont Blanc in Chamonix, I had been full of hypothetical foreboding. This trip, I worried, would be pedestrian, mechanical. Now, as I sat on the small ledge on the steep mountain face, I saw myself more clearly. In my arrogance I had brushed off the suggestion of a guidebook. Now we were reaping the consequences.

I squirmed and shifted my weight, trying to find a place where the rocks would not be digging into my buttocks. Settling into a better spot, I found myself under an inward assault of memory. In quick succession, I saw images of Chris Robbin's body, a tiny dot 2,000 feet below me at the base of El Capitan, and then the blood-streaked rock ledge high on Middle Cathedral Rock, and then my father tumbling down the lower snow fields of Mount Assinaboine, and then Tom Kopley crying out "Oh no!" just as he slid over the edge, and then Charles Cole suddenly, tensely silent as he saw that the rope above him was nearly cut in half. I felt my heart beat more quickly as my mind replayed my own 200-foot fall in Yosemite. Down I'm going, hitting knobs of rock and desperately trying to twist myself so that I don't hit my head on the corners I know that I'll be swinging into when the rope finally goes tight—and it takes a long time for the rope to go tight.

Even now, as I write these words decades later, in the comfort of my home, my throat tightens. The memories are as fresh and afflicting as ever, and to them others have been added. From more years of climbing I'm remembering the daggers of hanging ice, the unstable slopes of snow ready to avalanche, the loose pillars of rock, the shitty belay anchors, the rappel ropes jammed, the bands of shale on mountain faces that are nothing more than stacked blocks ready to crumble. I can hear the sickening, deep whirring sound that large, killer rocks make as they tumble and spin while they fall. I can smell the pungent, acrid odor of granite smashing into granite.

And I'm thinking about Steve Mascioli and Alex Lowe and others with whom I've climbed over the years and who have died in the mountains. Why did they take the risk? Why did I? Climbing in the French Alps without a guidebook is a stupid, unnecessary flirtation with danger; but how does it differ from the game of climbing itself? I cursed myself that night on the ledge on the Nant Blanc face. I remember just as vividly cursing Steve when I heard that he died on Mount Hunter in Alaska,

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and Alex when I found out that he had died in an avalanche in the Himalayas. Like my insistence that we forgo guidebooks, their deaths seemed to me the dark fruit of a vain enterprise.

BUT THESE and other reminders have produced little more than crooked branches of self-understanding intertwined with self-deception. I continue to climb. I don't doubt that I've done it for so many years because I'm good at it. It's fun to do something well.

Something more is going on, though, something captured in Aristotle's dictum that happiness is unimpeded activity. I dream sometimes about the wet, gray, crumbling limestone of the Canadian Rockies. I recall my parched mouth. I see in my mind's eye the long run of the rope down to my belayer. The afflicting memories return, but now they are gilt and alluring. The pain, the agonizing uncertainty, the exhaustion, the shocking realization that the mountains kill whom they will—it's all rearranged in my mind as a fire-lined gauntlet through which I have run, and I can think of nothing but the joy of running ever faster, ever harder. Even as I curse the vain folly of bringing death so close, I long for the adventure, for the lightning flashes of self-possession, for the tremendous concentration of will that comes from knowing that you've given yourself a thin margin for error.

This longing is not a death wish. On the contrary, I have come to see that my addiction to the risks of climbing is better understood not as wishing for death but as cursing it. God may have the power to defeat death, but I don't. My impotence angers me, as I think it has always angered men, underlying their desire for adventure. I've seen death often enough to know that she is repulsively ugly. I was not courting her on the Aiguille Verte; I was asserting against her my prerogative of life. And this act of self-assertion, it seems to me, explains the appeal of adventure.

Of course, the self-assertion is temporary, an illusion of the moment. No great ascent can cancel the car wreck that might kill me on the drive back from the mountains. No adventure overcomes the reality of divorce, the death of a child, or any of the deep mental anguish that finds its way into even the most fortunate of lives. So, yes, it's a temporary thrill. Yes, it's hopelessly arrogant. Yes, it's foolish and unnecessary. Yes, it's adolescent. Yes, it leads to illusions of grandeur. Yes, it deflects from a sober assessment of the human condition. Yes, it's a pagan impulse. Yes, yes, a thousand times yes. But ever since Agamemnon gathered the Greeks to sail to Troy, men have taken life-threatening risks in order to get close enough to death to give her the finger. It's a life-affirming thing to do, and it can't be done at a safe distance.

I was too young for such coherent thoughts on the snowy, cramped ledge in the French Alps in 1986. In any event, Colin was not going to give me the time for an all-night reverie, because he had come to his own conclusions. He stood up and in an authoritative tone said, "Look, Rusty, I think we ought to keep going in the dark." I hemmed and hawed, but Colin convinced me that we should not sit out the night. As long as we were going to be cold, we might as well be making headway. "You've got to get out of what you get into," he added with finality.

Colin has a way of making reasonable things sound reasonable, so I put him on belay. His headlamp began flickering below me. Maybe it was the busy work of managing the rope while belaying him, or maybe it was just the fact that we were now taking initiative, but for whatever reason my mind shifted from my inconclusive collage of doubts, fears, and memories to hunger. I thought about our stash of hard sausages back with the sleeping bags. I pictured myself cutting off slices flecked with large, white, glistening globs of fat.

Throughout the night we worked our way down the rock and ice, rappelling only the occasional steep sections where fear of falling overcame the fear of being stranded on the face without gear. Around four in the morning, when I was feeling particularly paranoid because we had only two slings and six or so pieces of gear left, Colin reassured me that we could always slice sections off the end of the rope to make extra slings. "Great," I replied, "then we can make still shorter rappels." I had a vision of us desperately trying to reach the base of the face by twenty-foot rappels on a cannibalized rope.

OUR ROPE was still 150 feet long when I shouted "off rappel" to Colin as dawn was ripening into day and I hung on the single ice screw above the dark, hungry, man-eating *bergschrund* at the base of the Nant Blanc face. Colin came down quickly, and with another rappel we were soon relaxing on a flat spot I had picked out from above. We had made the narrow passage.

The mental tension was released, but there was no rest. We were soon on the move. Descending farther down the glacier was out of the question. Its tortured icefall would take many hours to navigate. So up a promising gulley to the southwest we went,

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trying to gain the lower portion of the northwest ridge of the Aiguille Verte to make our way back to the Argentière glacier and our camping spot.

When we reached the top of the ridge, we were truly and fully exhausted. Only 200 feet away was the Grands-Montets station, the top of the *téléphérique* that begins far below in Argentière. We wearily shuffled past a large party of climbers learning to use their crampons and ice axes on the gentle slopes. Japanese women in tight shorts and high-heeled shoes leaned on the rails of the station, pointing toward the horizon. Perhaps they had spotted some climbers on the distant peaks. A family in tennis shoes walked tentatively onto the glacier. As we sat to rest on the steps of the station, caressed by a calm-breathing wind, Colin and I looked at each other. After the long night of tension, fear, and concentration, the scene seemed almost grotesque. Could we really have been so isolated and distressed only hours before?

In the heat of the late-morning sunshine we headed down and crossed the glacier to our gear in the boulders above the hut. I boiled water on the small backpacking stove, and made a cup of coffee that tasted like a supernaturally perfect combination of bourbon and chocolate and felt like liquid velvet running down my throat. Our exhaustion-dulled appetites awakened by caffeine, we turned our remaining food into a haphazard banquet. Colin sliced the hard sausages and cheese. I ripped open a bag of cookies and we made meat, cheese, and cookie sandwiches, rejoicing in the fat and sugar. After a giant pasta meal and more cookies, we slid satiated into our sleeping bags.

Fifteen hours later it was raining again. We inhaled what food remained, hiked back down to Argentière, took the small train into Chamonix, and made our way to the campground to recover our extra gear from John and Dave. We suggested that they join us for dinner and beers in town. "French fries dipped in mayonnaise," I explained to Dave, "can't be beat. It packs more calories per dollar than anything else."

We made the short walk and settled into a long evening of greasy food and beer at the Bar National. Becoming more expansive with every round, we told and retold our story. Between what we described and the pictures and descriptions in Dave's guidebook, we figured out that Colin and I had gone down the Nant Blanc face in the night. "Bloody hell," exclaimed John as he compared our descent with the Couturier Couloir. "You came down a more difficult route than you went up!" Then he added, with needling glee, "I'll bet you two made the first American descent."

I grabbed the guidebook from John. "Let's see if we can find something really serious for our next objective," I said to Colin with alcohol-enhanced bravado. Dave leaned back in his chair. He saw, perhaps, the perversity of our having turned a reckless, misconceived descent into a heroic endeavor. Or maybe he was just better at holding his liquor. "The fates might need a bit of a respite before they are taunted again," he quietly observed.

But our fears were now golden memories, and we wanted more. "What about the Central Pillar of Frêney?" I asked Colin, referring to a long route on the steep, remote, Italian side of Mont Blanc, hard to get to and difficult to climb. I handed him the guidebook with my finger in the page featuring an impressive picture. He grabbed the book and studied the pages. Then he looked up, his eyes narrowing to slits. "This time," he said, "we'll copy out a route description." I smiled and raised my glass.

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Memo to the New President *re* the Middle East

Amir Taheri

THE RETURN of Russia as a prime global menace has recently seized the attention of world governments, but another set of issues, collectively known as "the Middle East crisis," will continue to dominate the American and Western agenda for at least the near future. It will also demand the energies of whoever occupies the White House after George W. Bush.

The area, dubbed "the arc of crisis" by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, spans a vast region from Mauritania on the northwest African shores of the Atlantic Ocean to Pakistan on the southwestern Asian coast of the Indian Ocean. It contains almost two-thirds of the globe's known oil reserves at a time when—as the battle over Georgia also reminds us—competition for access to fossil fuels is intensifying daily. The arc has emerged as the conduit for the biggest migratory waves in the contemporary world. It is, in addition, the busiest hub of international terror and the scene of several wars—in Sudan, Somalia, the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As the only part of the world where non-democratic, not to say proudly anti-democratic, regimes predominate, the arc represents a permanent threat to regional stability and world peace.

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Relative to their populations, the nations of the arc of crisis spend a larger proportion of their gross domestic product on armament than do those anywhere else. Since the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, more Americans have died or been held hostage there than in any other region of the world. Since 2003, the arc has hosted the largest accumulations of American military personnel and war materiel outside the U.S. (and paradoxically has absorbed the biggest chunk of U.S. foreign aid). More important, perhaps, as the only part of the world where politics is defined largely through the prism of religious beliefs and aspirations, it may yet be the fount of a "clash of civilizations." With most versions of Christianity no longer prepared to resort to violence in support of a global missionary strategy, Islam remains the only major faith with the avowed ambition of uniting the whole of humanity under its banner, by force if necessary.

So the next President is certain to find a thick Middle East dossier on his desk as soon as he enters the Oval Office. He will also inherit a whole set of attitudes for dealing with the area, attitudes that have informed, bedeviled, and tripped up generation after generation of Western statesmen and diplomats. Only by understanding—and transcending—these encrusted views can he hope to exercise a genuinely positive influence on the course of events and thereby ameliorate the ills generated by and *within* the region while simultaneously advancing the American national interest.

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For more than two centuries, Western nations, starting with Britain and France and followed by the United States, saw the Middle East as an important piece in a global jigsaw puzzle of contending power. As a rule, their foreign policy aimed at preventing rival governments, notably czarist Russia and Germany, from seizing control of the region. The approach to the Middle East was geostrategic rather than geopolitical. That a threat could develop from within the region, without being prompted or at least encouraged and supported by the major powers outside it, seemed inconceivable.

This approach put the emphasis on stability, which in practice meant the stability of relations between local ruling elites and Western powers. It was, for instance, in the name of such stability that, beginning in the 1920's and continuing right up until the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, successive governments in Britain reneged on the Balfour Declaration's promise of allowing the Jews to re-create a homeland in Palestine. The rationale was that any change in existing arrangements could push the Arab elites toward an alliance with rival powers. After World War II, this meant the Soviet bloc.

In the end, however, the stability that the Western powers had hoped to preserve and perpetuate in the region was shattered in the 1950's and 60's not by anything they did or failed to do but by domestic developments, as various pro-Western regimes—in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen—were overthrown by indigenous movements motivated largely by indigenous aims. The anti-British war in Aden and southern Arabia, the anti-French revolt in Algeria, and the leftist rebellions in Dhofar and the Mussandam peninsula might not have reached the intensity they did without direct or indirect Soviet support. But all of them had internal causes that the Western powers, in their obsession with maintaining an untenable status quo, had ignored.

This is hardly to say that the Soviet cold-war threat was not a real one, or that there were no grounds for the Western fear that the Soviets might use the region to increase their naval power, threaten maritime trade, or cut the flow of oil to world markets. Even today, some observers rightly point with alarm at Russian efforts to stage a comeback in the Middle East. For example, Russia is currently engaged in negotiations with Syria to secure a naval base in the port of Lattaqiyah, the stronghold of the ruling al-Assad clan. The base would replace Sebastopol, the Ukrainian port where Russia holds a lease on naval facilities until 2017 (by which point Ukraine hopes to be a member of NATO).

Yet even if Russia succeeds in building an effective presence in the eastern Mediterranean, it still would not represent a major threat to Western interests or to the U.S., which remains the world's only blue-water naval power capable of ruling the waves, as Britannia never did. Today, the real threat to Western interests in the region comes from within, and it comes in three forms.

The first two threats are quickly stated. One comes from Sunni Salafi terrorist groups like al Qaeda and from the radical circles that help them with recruitment and financing. For the foreseeable future, the struggle against these terrorist groups is bound to entail a large military aspect, although the political aspect is no less pressing.

The second threat comes from the conservative regimes that are themselves frequent targets of the selfsame terrorists but that, in order to preserve their hold on power, have allowed or encouraged these radical elements to direct their discontent outward toward the U.S., Europe, and Israel. Often, and precisely in the name of preserving stability, the U.S. has supported these regimes, in some cases through military intervention. Thus, the U.S. has given the Egyptian regime of President Hosni Mubarak over $60 billion in direct aid since 1980, defending a status quo that has produced some of the most violent anti-American groups in the Arab world. The fact that, on at least one occasion, the Hashemite dynasty of Jordan has owed its survival to U.S. military intervention never prevented it from tolerating, if not actually encouraging, anti-American groups. And so forth.

Which brings us to the third and most direct threat. This is the one represented by Khomeinism, a proto-fascist ideology based on a radical reading of the Shiite version of Islam. On its own, and without the substantial resources of a major state like Iran, Khomeinism would have made little impression in the Middle East, where Sunni Muslims form a majority of the population. But by dint of Iran's resources, including massive income from oil exports (estimated in 2008 to run to $180 billion), Khomeinism has proved capable of building a support base throughout the arc of crisis, helping its clients in Lebanon (Hizballah) and Gaza (Hamas) to secure positions of power and defeat their common political rivals, and furthering its hegemonic ambitions in the Persian Gulf through a network of "sleepers" within the Shiite communities of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates.

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Tehran strategists appear to believe that the end of the Bush presidency offers an opportunity to fill the potential gap left by a weakening American military and political presence in the region. In this respect, the Khomeinist regime may be compared with the Prussian militarists in the early 19th century or even the Nazi regime in 1939. Like them, the Khomeinists want to dominate what they regard as their own "geopolitical habitat"—in this instance, the space between southern Asia and northern Africa—and thus to accomplish in the Middle East what Serbia failed to do in the Balkans—i.e., make the rest of the region look like themselves. That ambition is certain to lead to war—perhaps many wars. Only pre-emptive action by the United States and its allies can forestall such wars—which, with the Islamic Republic certain to acquire nuclear weapons, may assume far deadlier proportions than currently imaginable.

DURING THE cold war, the U.S. could follow the old paradigm to prevent Soviet domination of the Middle East. But as 9/11 showed, and as President Bush famously acknowledged, the stability supported by the U.S. had in reality become a cover for the rise of some of the world's most rabid and *de*-stabilizing forces. That old one-size-fits-all model is now wholly inappropriate.

It is hard to believe how quickly this happened. Eight years ago, the Middle East scarcely featured in the election campaign that led to George W. Bush's first term in the White House. Bill Clinton, working hard to build his legacy in the final phases of his tenure, had tried and failed to conjure up a peace accord between Israel and the Palestinian Authority under Yasir Arafat. Clinton had also tried to make a deal, somewhat pompously referred to as "The Grand Bargain," with the Islamic Republic in Iran. The deal would have acknowledged Iran's position as the key power in the Persian Gulf in exchange for its ceasing to support terrorist organizations and pursue nuclear weapons. Once again, nothing positive eventuated.

Why? Clinton failed to understand that in both cases he was negotiating with parties genetically programmed to reject compromise. Arafat had spent all of his adult life fighting for the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state, and was not about to transform himself into an ardent supporter of coexistence. The mullahs of Tehran had built their regime on the claim that they had a mission to lead the world away from the system created by the "infidel" and toward one based on Islamic values. They were not about to retreat to a corner of the globe and a minor role scripted by the American "Great Satan."

Since 9/11, the U.S. has made a bold start in a more promising direction, in large part by resolving to deal with the countries in the region as they are, individually, and to devise policy accordingly. The intervening years, dominated by American preoccupation with Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran—with the Arab-Israeli problem fading almost into the background—have seen great upheaval, have sparked many hopeful developments, and have left much unfinished business.

To start with the positive, the region has been rid of two dangerous and evil regimes. Together, the Taliban "emirate" in Kabul and the Baathist regime in Baghdad had not only provoked several civil and regional wars but had emerged, alongside the Islamic Republic in Iran, as the principal protectors of terrorist gangs. Bush's readiness to take military action sent a powerful political message: the United States, a guarantor of the regional status quo since the 1940's, was prepared to act as a force for change.

And the Bush administration did promote such change, almost wholly for the better. In so doing, moreover, it persuaded many of the region's conservative ruling elites to consider the possibility of reform themselves. Almost all have added some form of representation to their respective nations' political mix. In addition to Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which under U.S. supervision have conducted a series of referendums and elections, establishing national sovereignty as the basic principle of their political systems and popular will as the main source of their legitimacy, the oil-rich Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf have also moved toward some form of constitutional government, not least by abandoning the fiction that the Qur'an is constitution enough.

In the past eight years, the sultanates of Oman and Bahrain have held three sets of reasonably free and fair elections for consultative assemblies that could, in time, develop into bona-fide parliaments. Kuwait, which already has a bona-fide parliament, has extended the suffrage to women and held three successive free elections. Even Saudi Arabia, despite its suspicion of Western-style politics, has agreed to broaden decision-making at the local level by organizing municipal elections. Thanks to "people power," Syria was forced in 2005 to end its 29-year-long military occupation of Lebanon. In Egypt, the ruling party has accepted a measure of power-sharing, and President Mubarak has grudgingly submitted to the first multi-candidate presidential election in Egypt's history.

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While many have dismissed President Bush's democratization talk as nothing but rhetoric, there is, in fact, evidence that he has succeeded in putting the issue of democracy at the center of political debate in the Middle East. In the 1950's, the big theme in the region was nationalism and anti-colonialism. In the 1960's it was pan-Arabism and, to a lesser extent, socialism. In the 1970's, the main theme was Islamism, both Sunni and Shiite. In the past seven years, democracy has taken its place.

Even an avowedly anti-democratic regime like the Islamic Republic in Iran has reworked its political vocabulary to inject a democratic tone, albeit with the adjective "Islamic" attached. A generation ago, secular despotism was the established order in Iran, Islamism the challenger. Now that Islamism is in power, democracy is the challenger and, by implication, the wave of the future.

Another positive element is the defeat inflicted on the numerous terrorist groups collectively known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan. It may well be that this deadliest of the Salafi terrorist movements has started a historic decline from which it will not recover. What is certainly clear is that the underlying mood in the Arab countries has shifted. Groups that once welcomed a flood of recruits are now finding it difficult or impossible to attract new "volunteers for martyrdom." They have also been running out of money, as the flow of donations from wealthy businessmen and emirs in the Persian Gulf has dwindled to a trickle.

The Bush administration can also take pride in having prevented terrorists from mounting a successful repeat attack inside U.S. territory. Despite dozens of attempts, some reportedly designed to be deadlier than 9/11, al Qaeda and copycat groups have failed to penetrate fortress America. And this has led to a strategic debate within the terrorist world itself. Some, including Osama bin Laden or his impersonator, continue to regard attacks on the American mainland as a matter of high priority. Others, like Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu-Bakr Naji, key theoreticians of al Qaeda, have argued for a more local approach, suggesting that jihad should focus on Muslim governments and be cultivated within Muslim communities in Europe.

THAT, HOWEVER, reminds us of what remains to be done. In Iraq, President Bush may yet sign an agreement on the status of U.S. and allied forces beyond the December expiration of their United Nations mandate. Yet would any such agreement be secure? At home, no matter who is elected President, a U.S. Senate with an even stronger Democratic majority than the present one is hardly guaranteed to endorse a strategic agreement negotiated by Bush. And the agreement could also be challenged on the Iraqi side, especially if, as most opinion polls indicate, the current coalition government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki is not returned to power in the 2009 general election.

There is also much that is worrisome in Afghanistan. Seven years after 9/11, the latest security estimates show that the Taliban and allied groups, including remnants of al Qaeda, have established or re-established a presence in fourteen of the country's 29 provinces. Meanwhile, President Hamid Karzai's administration in Kabul appears gripped by corruption, political fatigue, and a loss of moral authority. To complicate matters further, America's NATO allies, far from providing needed additional troops and resources, have been looking for ways of reducing their commitment to the Afghan campaign.

In Pakistan, the departure of President Pervez Musharraf may have little or no effect on the lagging battle against terrorism there. Signs abound that pro-Islamist elements within the military, and more specifically in the security services collectively known as ISI, have resumed their support for terrorist groups not only in Pakistan itself but also in India and Afghanistan. A series of terrorist operations in India in July and a spectacular attack against Chinese police in Xingjian (East Turkistan) in August, not to mention several suicide attacks claiming over 100 lives in Pakistan itself, come as vivid reminders of the regional threat posed by terrorism generated in parts of Afghanistan and the Pakistani "badlands."

In Yemen, terrorist groups linked to al Qaeda have tried to compensate for losses in Iraq by acquiring safe havens in the south of the country. Al Qaeda is also trying to establish itself as a major force in North Africa: this year, several Algerian groups merged with al Qaeda to set up a terrorist outfit with branches in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania. In August alone, over 80 people were killed in Algeria in suicide attacks claimed by Al Qaeda in Maghreb.

The 2006 war between Israel and the Lebanese branch of Hizballah transformed that Iran-controlled group into a key player in Lebanon and an even greater threat to Israeli security. This past spring, Hizballah sent its fighters into Christian districts of Beirut, obliging the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to grant it an effective veto on all key decisions. Consolidating its po-

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sition as a state within a state, Hizballah has purchased whole villages from Lebanese Christians and Druze for future settlement by Shiites—the idea being to create territorial contiguity among the Shiite-majority areas of Beirut, the Bekaa valley, and the region south of the Litani River. With money from Iran, Hizballah is also building a network of fiber-optic communications beyond the control of the Lebanese state. The "party" also controls Beirut airport and owns its own jetties and docks in the Lebanese capital's port, enabling it to import and export whatever it wants without the approval of government authorities. The emergence of a Hizballah-dominated mini-state in Lebanon, coupled with Hamas's control of Gaza, puts Israel in the middle of a pincer ultimately controlled by Tehran.

As for the reinvigorated Islamic Republic of Iran itself, the regime has good reason to believe it has won the first round against the "Great Satan" by preserving its nuclear program in the teeth of international pressure and UN-imposed sanctions. At the same time, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tough anti-American rhetoric and promise to wipe Israel off the map has resonated loudly in areas far beyond Iran's borders. A poll conducted by the liberal Ibn Khaldun foundation in Cairo identified Ahmadinejad, a figure increasingly disliked at home, as the most popular foreign leader for Egyptians. Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese branch of Hizballah, came second.

IN SUM, the next U.S. administration faces a daunting task in the Middle East. But consider again what it has to build on, and what clarifying advantages have accrued. As of January 2001, the U.S. political establishment still had no appreciation of the threat that was taking shape in the region. Sunni Salafi terrorists were regarded as weirdos engaged in criminal activities, to be stopped by the FBI. Democracy was thought of as a Western luxury that Muslims could not afford or did not need. The Khomeinist regime in Tehran was seen as an oddity, a system dominated by mullahs obsessed with beards and hijabs.

The new administration, by contrast, will not be walking blindly into a minefield. It will know, for instance, that the United States, whether it likes it or not, is still at war—and, in a sense, has been at war since 1979 when Khomeinist "students" raided the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held its diplomats hostage. And it will know that the forces dedicated to killing Americans and challenging the United States' global leadership role cannot be placated but have to be confronted and ultimately defeated.

The next administration will also know that, as long as democracy is not established in the Middle East, the region will remain a source of threats to the West. Thus, democratization is an imperative of American national security. Fortunately, for the first time since the constitutional revolutions of Turkey and Iran in the early decades of the last century, it is also a live option in the Middle East itself. The small but growing constituency of genuine democrats that has emerged in virtually all states of the region, together with other moderate, conservative, and traditional but non-violent forces, could—if adequately supported by the United States—offer a real alternative to the despotic regimes that are the ultimate seedbeds of violent radicalism.

Democratization is all the more urgently needed because the Middle East risks becoming a center for nuclear proliferation—with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and maybe even Syria following Iran's drive to acquire an arsenal of atomic warheads. This could open the door in turn to what is known as "retail proliferation," with nuclear arms finding their way into the hands of terrorists across the globe.

In this connection, it is well to emphasize something else the next administration should know: namely, that the Israel-Palestinian issue, although of symbolic importance, is ultimately far from being the region's main problem. To the contrary, obsessive focus on this issue has served as a means of avoiding other, more pressing ones: misrule, fanaticism, economic underdevelopment, social and cultural oppression. These problems existed before Israel came into being and, unless they are solved, will continue to haunt the region and generate terrorism long after a Palestinian state appears or fails to appear on the map.

In short, as in the cold war between Western liberal democracy and Soviet totalitarianism, the fight in the Middle East is ultimately an ideological one. On the one side there is the Western ideology of human rights, pluralism, democracy, and the rule of law. On the other side there is the obscurantist Islamist ideology of Khomeini and Osama bin Laden, together with its less defined variations, all marked by the rejection of the modern world and by dreams of global conquest. No amount of material aid and commercial cooperation can, on its own, defeat that ideology, although both economic aid and trade can be powerful tools in the struggle. It is on the political field of battle that Islamism,

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like its predecessor Soviet Communism, must eventually experience its strategic defeat.

This also means that one of the first tasks of the next President will also be to win the battle of hearts and minds inside the U.S. itself. For nothing could so cripple the successful prosecution of the struggle abroad as continued dissension at home, of the kind that has disfigured the American political debate over Iraq and the war on terror. By the same token, nothing would go farther toward ensuring ultimate victory in the long struggle ahead than the perception abroad that the United States is a power capable of deploying its resources in pursuit of clear policy objectives backed by both main political parties and enjoying the steady support of the American people.

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My Pocket Bible

Hillel Halkin

At the time, it seemed so imaginative an exegesis that I thought of doing something fictional with it. In the end, nothing came of it. The other night, though, I found myself reading the *parshah* of *Vayera*. That's the fourth Torah reading of Genesis, the one that tells about the binding of Isaac. Although I rarely go to synagogue, there was a time when I regularly kept up with the weekly Torah readings at home: on Saturday mornings I would sit down with my edition of *Mikra'ot G'dolot* and go through the week's *parshah* with the Aramaic of Onkelos and the medieval commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides. In recent years the habit has lapsed, but I still keep a little Bible by my bed that I sometimes open before falling asleep.

It's the same Bible I was given at the ceremony that ended two months of basic training for new immigrants after my induction into the Israeli army in 1974. The ceremony was held at the Western Wall with floodlights, flags, and all the rest, but the part I remember best was the soldier standing next to me. He was a Russian who spoke little Hebrew, and when, asked to swear to defend the state of Israel, we raised our Bibles and exclaimed *ani nishba*, *ani nishba*, *ani nishba*, "I swear, I swear, I swear," he shouted *anyi nishbar*, *anyi nishbar*, *anyi nishbar*—"I can't take it any more, I can't take it any more, I can't take it any more."

This Bible fit comfortably into the pocket of my army fatigue pants and had the insignia of the chaplaincy corps on its dark blue cover and those of the Israel Defense Force's other branches on its title page. At the back were maps of Palestine and the ancient Middle East, including one of the Promised Land from the Nile to the Euphrates and two or three of Joshua's military conquest of Canaan. I liked my little Bible that I had sworn allegiance to a Jewish state on and used to take it with me when I traveled as a good-luck charm. Once, it almost brought me bad luck.

This happened on an Air France flight from Djibouti to Jedda. I hadn't planned to be in Djibouti. I was sailing from Muscat, the capital of Oman, to Eilat on a yacht owned by a Dutch shipping magnate whose autobiography I was ghostwriting. This Dutchman was a madman who liked, so he claimed, to swim with sharks, and as we approached the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aden he let me know that he intended to do some illegal coral-reef diving off the coast of Sudan. The Sudanese government then was no better than it is now and I told him I wanted to get off.

He dumped me in Djibouti, a hellish place. I was so desperate to get out of it that, told by a travel agent in Place Rimbaud that the only available seat in the days ahead was on a flight to Jedda, from which I could get a connection to Istanbul and from there to Tel Aviv, I took it. Now, as we began

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our descent, I was given a Saudi Arabian landing card to fill out. It had a line asking for my religion. I flagged a stewardess, explained that I was Jewish and traveling on a U.S. passport issued in Tel Aviv, and asked her what I should do.

"Write Christian," she advised.

The passenger next to me, a Lebanese who did business with the Saudis, overheard the conversation. "Don't worry," he said. "The worst they'll do is search your bags and question you. You'll make your flight to Istanbul."

It was only as we were touching down that I remembered my little Bible. It was in my suitcase in the baggage hold. The Lebanese businessman said:

"Don't get off the plane."

I called for the stewardess again. Fortunately, the flight was continuing to Paris; unfortunately, it was full. After some hurried consultations, a purser came aboard, bumped a boarding passenger, and issued me a new ticket. It said "Jedda-Paris-Tel Aviv" and was among my prized curios until I accidentally threw it out one day while cleaning my desk.

THE RESERVE unit I was assigned to after finishing basic training was a 90-millimeter anti-tank gun company. Towed by a command car, the 90-millimeter was a World War II American weapon. It made a huge bang and had a savage kick, and since, despite its kilometer range, it wasn't very accurate at over six or seven hundred meters, the idea was to camouflage your position well and let the enemy come as close as possible before firing. The unofficial wisdom was that if your first round missed it would be best not to stick around for a second, because, against an Egyptian or Syrian Soviet-made T-72, there wasn't likely to be one.

Although the 90 millimeter was being phased out of the IDF, to be replaced by TOW missiles, the process was incomplete. Once, on a visit to New York, I came across a shop that sold antique toy soldiers and stepped in to look for a present for a friend in Jerusalem who collected them. Amid the display of Greek hoplites, Roman legionnaires, Persian archers, Crusader knights, Turkish janissaries, Russian hussars, and Napoleonic grenadiers, I spied a familiar sight: four helmeted GI's, a gunner, loader, server, and crew captain, crouched behind a 90 millimeter anti-tank gun. The owner was so impressed by my expertise that he kept me in his shop for half an hour.

We trained on our antique cannon one week a year, firing at metal barrels in the Negev. The rest of our annual month of duty was spent in the occupied territories or manning a line on the border. We belonged to the 300th Infantry Brigade, whose headquarters were in the north, and so were the borders we were sent to.

My first long stint of reserve duty came exactly a year after the Yom Kippur War. It was on the border with Lebanon, the other side of which was controlled in those days by the Palestine Liberation Organization. Our company was responsible for ten kilometers of it. I was in a platoon stationed in a hilltop outpost facing the Lebanese village of Maroun-e-Ras. That name may ring a bell, because three summers ago there was heavy fighting there with Hizballah. But Hizballah did not exist in 1974 and Maroun-e-Ras was a sleepy place whose residents shared the streets with donkeys and beat-up old cars. I could once have told you the numbers of their license plates, since one of our jobs was to peer at the village through a small telescope, report on anything unusual, and record it in a log. The only things that were of any interest never made it into the log. *The young man living in the house next to the Maronite priest's was flirting again today with the girl from around the corner. This morning the owner of the circa 1955 Chevrolet slapped his son as the boy left for school.* It was like bird watching, except that you were always looking at the same species.

The nights were often lit by flares. Beyond the electrified fence that marked the border was a jungle full of nocturnal life: Israeli ambushes for PLO infiltrators, PLO ambushes for the ambushers, Lebanese informers rendezvousing with their Israeli handlers, drug smugglers who tossed bags of cocaine or heroin over the fence for pick-up by accomplices. Now and then, the headlights of a patrol swept the macadam road that paralleled the dirt security path beyond the outpost. The path was checked every morning for footprints by Bedouin trackers and smoothed again for the next night.

Several nights a week, I had guard duty. The outpost consisted of a concrete bunker in which we slept, washed, cooked, ate, and sat around watching TV or playing cards, a double perimeter fence of barbed concertina wire, connecting trenches, and two watchtowers, each equipped with a .50-caliber heavy machine gun; for four hours you made the rounds with a partner. The bad shift was the twelve-to-four. By the time you fell asleep before midnight, it was almost time to get up, and by the time you fell asleep again before dawn, it was almost time to get up again.

ONE NIGHT I drew the twelve-to-four with someone I hardly knew. He didn't belong to our company and had been posted to it temporarily. My only contact with him, if you could call it

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that, had come a day or two earlier. I was reading the week's *parshah* in my little Bible when he passed behind my chair, paused for a moment, and moved on. I didn't look up. I'm that way myself. If someone is reading something, I like to know what it is.

October nights are cold in the Upper Galilee. We both wore our army windbreakers, bulky beneath our M-16 rifles and battle harnesses with their magazines and grenades. The sky was bright with stars. Cassiopeia, Perseus, the Swan—I got to know them in the army.

He had on a stocking cap pulled down over his ears in place of the skullcap I had seen him wear in the bunker. He was the only soldier in the outpost who went around with one; there weren't many religiously observant men in our company. This was one of the few things you could tell at a glance about someone in uniform. The rest—who was a spiffy dresser and who wore jeans and sandals, who liked loud colors and who preferred quiet ones—had to wait for the day of your discharge. That's what uniforms are for, of course. But their consequence is that you talk more than you might otherwise. One look at most people and you know you have nothing to say to them or they to you. In the army, it took a while to find that out.

I don't remember his name and won't bother making one up. His Hebrew had a French accent. He and his wife had come to Israel from Strasbourg soon after their marriage. He had fought in the 1967 war as the driver of a halftrack on the Golan Heights and was wounded when it hit a mine, after which the two of them went back to France; they had a baby there and split up. His wife was now living with their son in the countryside—in Quercy, I think it was. I gathered she was with another man. She wanted a divorce and he didn't.

He took out his wallet and showed me a frayed photograph. Beneath the beam of a pocket flashlight, the woman was pretty, with large, dark eyes. The boy on whose shoulder her bare arm rested looked just like her. Behind them was the mossy stone wall of an old house or chateau.

He'd returned to Israel after the Yom Kippur war. His old unit no longer needed him and the army hadn't decided where to place him. Meanwhile, he was doing his reserve duty with us.

We had made several rounds of the outpost and were standing by the entrance to the bunker. "I'll make us coffee," I said.

He wanted his strong and unsweetened.

I brought the coffees and we gulped them quickly before the cold air drained their heat.

"So what made him do it?" he asked.

"Who?" I had been looking up at the sky and must have missed something.

"Abraham."

"Avi Rahat?" There was an Abraham in our outpost.

"Avi in *Vayera*. You were reading it."

So I was. "I suppose he was desperate," I said. I assumed he was asking about the binding of Isaac. It's a difficult story. As I see it, God was desperate, too.

"Too desperate to care who screwed his wife?"

It took me a moment to follow him. "That's not quite what the Bible says," I said.

"It isn't?"

"Not in *Vayera*. Avimelech is said not to have touched her."

"I'll bet he didn't. And Pharaoh?"

"That's more ambiguous."

"Ambiguous, my eye! What do you think they were doing while he was giving Abraham all those he-asses and she-asses?"

You had to grant he knew his Bible. The story about Pharaoh wasn't in *Vayera*. It was in the chapter before it, in the *parshah* of *Lekh-Lekha*, the one that begins with God's telling Abraham to "get thee out of thy land." He's called Abram then, and he leaves Ur of the Chaldees with his wife Sarai, eventually makes it to Canaan, and then heads for Egypt when famine breaks out. According to *Lekh-Lekha*:

> And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon. Therefore, it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, 'This is his wife,' and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee."
>
> And it came to pass that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he treated Abram well for her sake; and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her to me to wife. And now behold thy wife, and take her, and go thy way."

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The story in *Vayera* is similar. Now Abraham and his wife are back in Canaan. He decides to try his luck in "the south country," in the little kingdom of Gerar. The Bible says:

> And Abraham said of his wife, "She is my sister," and Avimelech king of Gerar sent and took her. But God came to Avimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold thou art as good as dead for the woman which thou hast taken, for she is a man's wife." But Avimelech had not come near her. Then Avimelech called Abraham and said unto him, "What hast thou done unto us? And what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done."

You had to wonder. *Twice?* Once should have been more than enough. Nahmanides certainly thought so. To rationalize Abraham's behavior, he turned the biblical sequence of events around and proposed that, on both occasions, Sarah was first snatched on royal command because of her beauty. Only then, when she was already a prisoner in Pharaoh or Avimelech's palace, did Abraham claim she was his sister to save his neck.

"Nahmanides," said my partner, "is full of it."

"He tried."

"He shouldn't have. You still haven't answered my question."

"What made him do it? The Bible says. He was afraid to be killed."

"By who? As soon as they find out who she is, they apologize and hand her back. And he wasn't a coward."

"You think sacrificing Isaac makes him brave?"

"Forget about Isaac. Think of the four kings."

That was in *Lekh-Lekha*:

> And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedarlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goyim that these made war with Bera king of Sodom and with Birsha king of Gomorrah. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided his forces against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

"Three-hundred-and eighteen men and he chases them to Damascus! Is that a man afraid to protect his wife?"

"You tell me, then," I said. "What made him do it?"

"No, you tell me. Who gave her the clap?"

"What?"

"Whatever it was that he caught from her. 'And the Lord plagued Pharaoh great plagues because of Sarah.' It wasn't the chicken pox."

A mortar whumped in the distance. We fell silent, waiting for the flare. It ignited beyond Maroun-e-Ras, out toward Bint J'beil, a midnight sun drifting slowly earthward beneath its invisible parachute. It vanished before hitting the ground, leaving behind a briefly struggling spark, like the tip of a candle wick that goes out.

"She didn't get it from Abraham, either."

He was a very angry religious Jew. But I was beginning to get the picture. "All right," I said. "For the sake of argument, let's say you're right. Our mother Sarah was not who we've been taught she was. She slept around. Abraham doesn't know what to do. He's a cuckold. He can't control her. He's brave, but he's no wife-beater. And so he says, 'Look, just do me one favor. Don't tell anyone we're married. At least spare me that. Wherever we go, you're my sister.' Have I gotten it right?"

"So far."

"But why does he stay with her? Why not leave her?"

"He can't."

"Why not?"

"He's been promised her son."

He was right about that, too:

> And God said unto Abraham, "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her. Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations. Kings of people shall be of her."

"And maybe he's enough of a schmuck to still love her," he added.

"So he's stuck with her."

"Forever," he said bitterly.

I was touched by him.

"You know," I said, "you should try seeing Sarah's side of it."

He said nothing.

"After all, she's just a girl from Ur of the

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Chaldees. She marries Abraham. He's ten years older than her. The Bible says he's a hundred and she's ninety when Isaac is born."

"If he's a hundred, so am I."

"I agree. Their ages in the story don't make sense. They would, though, if they were divided in half."

I had a theory about that. Jewish tradition tells us there were once two New Year's days, one in autumn and one in spring. Count every year in the story of Abraham as half of one, from autumn to spring and back again, and it worked out perfectly.

"She's seventeen, say, and he's twenty-two. She's young and pretty, and she comes from a good home, and she loves her handsome new husband who has wonderful thoughts that he talks about in words she pretends to understand, and she wants to be a good wife, and have lots of children, and go on being the darling of her family and friends.

"A year or two go by and she's still not pregnant. And then, one day, her husband comes and tells her that they're leaving Ur and moving to a faraway place called Haran. Why? Because. This time she doesn't pretend to understand. She argues. She cries. It doesn't do any good. A wife does as she's told."

I was improvising on his theme now.

"They move to Haran. It's not a big city like Ur. It's a provincial capital, a hick town. No one knows how to speak or dress. She hates it. She misses her family and friends. Most of the women her age have more than one child. If she had one too, it would play with theirs and she would have friends; she wouldn't be so bored and jealous and miserable. She and Abraham quarrel all the time. *Why did you bring me to this place? But can't you see there's a purpose to it all? Then tell me what it is! I'll tell you when I know.* Much of the time, he's not home; he's busy accumulating the wealth the Bible says he gathered in Haran. Perhaps it's now that she has her first affair. At first she's frightened. But she's surprised how simple it is, how easy to conceal. It fills the days, dulls the pain of an empty womb.

"And then it happens. A voice speaks to Abraham. It tells him to leave Haran for a land he will be shown. 'I will make of thee a great nation,' it says. 'I will bless thee and make thy name great.' It is what he has been waiting for. Sarah doesn't know what to think. Half of her no longer believes a word he says. Half is full of new hope.

"They set out for Canaan. Her hopes don't last long. It's worse than she could have imagined. They live in tents, they wander from place to place, today here, tomorrow there. Haran was heaven by comparison. One morning she wakes up with lice in her hair. Lice! And Abraham doesn't even notice. He's listening to his voice. *Sarai, it said to me, 'Unto thy seed will I give this land!'* What land? What seed? She is almost forty. No seed can sprout in barren soil. When she sleeps with other men, she imagines they are tilling her, not like the rocky earth of Canaan, but like the deep loam of Ur. She no longer bothers to hide it from Abraham. He hears voices? Let him hear them talking about her.

"There is famine in Canaan. They set out again, this time for Egypt. Abraham is silent most of the way. When they are almost there, he says to her—"

"Say thou art my sister." He said it so softly I could hardly hear.

"It's your turn to make the coffee," I said.

I STOOD OUTSIDE the bunker, looking up at the sky. Orion had risen in the east, his sword glittering with diamonds.

> And Abraham said, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" And He brought him forth abroad, and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them." And He said unto him, "So shall thy seed be." And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness.

People have trouble with the binding of Isaac. It makes Abraham a monster in their eyes. And maybe he really becomes one. Who can imagine killing his own child?

But you have to imagine harder than that.

When does he first hear the voice?

He is in his twenties when he leaves Ur. Fifty when Isaac is born. Fifty-seven or fifty-eight, give or take a year or two, when he puts a knife to the boy's throat. And all those years, it speaks to him.

A voice of his own! He has never known anyone else who had one. For it, he has gambled away everything, caused the woman he loves to hate him. For years she has been convinced he is mad. *A mother of nations!* What nations? Ishmael? She'd have strangled Ishmael with her own two hands if he hadn't driven the boy and his mother away.

His whole life has been a delusion. He has kept faith with a voice that has lied to him.

And then the miracle takes place and Isaac is born. This doesn't win Sarah back. It's too late for that; a wary peace now reigns between them. Their son is hostage to it. Still! Thirty-five years. Now every one of them is justified—if, that is, it was worth losing a woman for a voice.

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For a long while, he doesn't hear from it. It doesn't matter. He knows it will be there when he needs it. And indeed, one day it speaks again. "Abraham!" it says. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah. And offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

What does he do now? What would *you* do? Not what Abraham does, of course. But that's why he's in the Bible and you aren't.

The coffee was good. "How many times did you boil it?" I asked.

"Twice," he said.

We laughed. There was an army superstition that you had to bring Turkish coffee to a boil an odd number of times. Some said three, some five or seven, but it had to be odd.

The night was getting colder. The warmth of the coffee wore off quickly.

We resumed our rounds, walking from watchtower to watchtower. The subject of *Vayera* was exhausted. We talked about our leaves. Each of us had forty-eight hours. There was a certain amount of negotiating. Most men preferred a weekend, but if someone wanted Wednesday to Friday because his business needed him on Thursday, someone else was sure to have a daughter who had a birthday the same day. My partner didn't care. He lived by himself and had no one to go home to.

"When will you see your son?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Maybe next summer. If I go to France."

Something was on his mind and I waited for it.

"He's not even his, you know."

"Who's not whose?"

He looked at me as though I were a particularly slow pupil. "How many years did you say Sarah spent trying to have a child?"

"Twenty-five," I said. "More or less."

"And after twenty-five years with Abraham she suddenly gets pregnant from him? She's not even living with him when it happens. She's with Avimelech. They've been shacked up for months."

It was in the little Bible in the pocket of my fatigue pants:

> And Avimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Avimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants, and they bore children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Avimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. And the Lord remembered Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age.

"He's Avimelech's," he said. "Sometimes Abraham feels he could kill him."

We trudged in silence, our M-16's slung over our shoulders. *For we shall think of them by day and by night.* That was from the evening prayer. *Therefore, O Lord our God, when we lie down and when we rise, may we converse about Thy laws and rejoice in the words of Thy Torah, for we shall think of them by day and by night.* It was only two-thirty.

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OBSERVATIONS

The Architect and the Machine

Michael J. Lewis

THE CENTRAL fact of architecture in our time is the collapse of the modern movement. One by one, the central planks of architectural modernism—moral urgency, an agenda of social reform, and a strong sense of historical mission—have fallen away, leaving only the forms to live on. Without modernism's social program to underpin it, architecture has become a species of commercial art, adjusting its façades and spaces with no more ideological consideration than goes into the updating of a hemline.

Paradoxically, this development has made the major modern architects far more interesting figures than they were a generation ago. In the 1960's, modernism's luminaries had come to be ridiculed for their humorlessness, their authoritarian disposition, and their utter obliviousness to the complex reality of life as it is actually lived. In particular, their stance of moral seriousness seemed preposterous. Today, however, things look rather different. Perhaps because an age of anarchy always looks yearningly toward rule-givers, there is considerable nostalgia for and curiosity about the heroes of modernism. This may explain the recent spate of major books and exhibitions on such mid-20th-century masters as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (2001), Marcel Breuer (2007), and Eero Saarinen (2008).

Now it is the turn of Le Corbusier, a man whose career was a kind of précis of 20th-century history. What other architect, after all, could boast of having served Joseph Stalin, Marshal Pétain, and Jawaharlal Nehru? Although he is remembered for his distinctive personal language of flat roofs, pristine white planes, and continuous bands of windows, Le Corbusier did far more than merely cultivate a signature style. He created buildings that were exemplars of their type even as they transformed those types. He devised a new kind of suburban house (the Villa Savoye), open in plan and buoyed aloft on slender *pilotis*; an apartment house (the Unité de Habitation in Marseille) that functioned as a miniature city with internal streets; and a church (Ronchamp) treated as an inhabitable sculpture rendered in freeform concrete. His ideas about city planning were applied across the globe, especially—for better or worse—in America's far-reaching urban-renewal programs.

Yet despite Le Corbusier's overweening importance, and despite the vast archives of the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, there has been no comprehensive biography until now. Hence, one turns with the highest of expectations to *Le Corbusier, A Life*,* the product of nearly a decade's labor by Nicholas Fox Weber, the longtime director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation and the author of thirteen other books on artists and collectors.

"LE CORBUSIER" is an artificial persona, a pseudonym adopted by the architect after World War I. He was born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret in 1887 in La-Chaux-de Fonds, Switzerland, in the center of the precision-watch industry. His father, a dial-painter who enameled

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watchcases with decorative designs, groomed him for the same trade, sending him at the age of fourteen to the local art school. There he blossomed under the tutelage of the charismatic Charles L'Eplattenier, excelling at watercolor and the invention of ornament and acquiring a stupendous graphic facility that he carried with him to the end.

Le Corbusier would in time come to renounce architectural ornament categorically, and to dismiss his own early efforts as juvenilia. But while his aesthetic philosophy changed, what would not was his insistence on presenting his artistic choices as the imperatives of logic and objectivity. This stubborn strand in his character was evidently the contribution of his mother, the dominant personality of his youth and beyond. A quietly intense woman who gave piano lessons, she died in 1960, when Le Corbusier himself was seventy-three. From her came the vocabulary of moral rectitude and duty that lent his writings their distinctly Calvinist undertone. The mutually hectoring, affectionate, and manipulative correspondence of mother and son, carried on over a half-century, is the principal document of his psychological development.

When loss of sight in one eye made his studies difficult, Le Corbusier relinquished the "degrading *métier*" of his father and turned to architecture. His gifts were immediately evident. At the age of seventeen he was asked by one of his teachers to design a mountain villa, and with the fee he set off on a prolonged study trip. He spent much of 1907-1911 out of the country, working from time to time as a draftsman to replenish his coffers. These stints, coupled with his sketching tours and early training in the applied arts, constituted the whole of his architectural education.

The years in question were the formative period of European modernism, especially in the urban triumvirate of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Le Corbusier's peculiarly Swiss freedom, both geographic and mental, allowed him to seek work in each and thereby to create a synthesis of the leading currents of international modernism. In each city, he presented himself to the most progressive architectural firm, being rebuffed only in Vienna. In Paris he worked for Auguste Perret, the first architect to use concrete imaginatively and expressively and not merely as a surrogate for stone. In Berlin it was Peter Behrens, an architectural polyglot who handled every aspect of design for the German electrical company AEG and whose industrial rationality would strongly stamp the Bauhaus. (Both Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius were products of Behrens's office.)

WORLD WAR I hardly touched Le Corbusier—thanks to his Swiss passport, he could travel easily to both Germany and France. But it did direct his attention to the problem of mass housing. Offered a job in Germany, he moved instead to Paris, where he worked from 1917 until his death. He soon befriended the capricious painter-publicist Amédée Ozenfant, who introduced him to a much more radical modernism than he had yet imagined.

In Ozenfant's judgment, Cubism was a bourgeois decorative fad that had played itself out and would give way to a new art of rigor, precision, and purity, such as were embodied in the machine; this doctrine he termed Purism. Le Corbusier applied its principles to the studio/residence he built for Ozenfant, a boxy concrete affair with enormous industrial windows. It was the first of his buildings to live up to his famous maxim, "a house is a machine for living in."

For five years, Le Corbusier worked eyeball to eyeball with Ozenfant. The two painted together, collaborated on books, and jointly edited the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1920-1925). It was in its pages that he first dropped his given name for the alter ego Le Corbusier, a willful purging of tradition and inherited identity that seemed to correspond to the same process of purification occurring in his designs. Ozenfant himself was purged shortly thereafter—for while Le Corbusier enjoyed working with collaborators, he preferred them in clearly subordinate roles. This held true as well for his wife Yvonne—an attractive milliner whom he kept out of sight and who sank into alcoholism—and for his architectural partner Pierre Jeanneret, his second cousin and the keel to his sail.

In 1923, Le Corbusier codified his architectural philosophy in *Vers une Architecture*, the single most influential treatise of architectural modernism. (The original English title, *Toward a New Architecture*, loses the arresting terseness.) The text—which he wrote jointly with Ozenfant, later expunging his co-author's name—was striking in the brusqueness of its declarations. Even more startling were the images, which juxtaposed such dissimilar objects as Greek temples and modern automobiles to make the point that both were products of standardization and incremental refinement.

In his strenuous insistence on applying to architecture the principles and even the forms of the machine, Le Corbusier paid special attention to transportation, studying the living spaces of airplanes, locomotives, ocean liners, even dirigibles (he once traveled from Paris to Rio de Janeiro in a zeppelin). Not only did he admire the streamlined forms, ramps, and railings of staterooms and cabins, using them as devices in the Villa Savoye; he also admired the extreme efficiency and objectivity of their designers, who were forced to work within the tightest of constraints. The clearances of height and width in a luxury train car, he was fond of pointing out, would in most countries be forbidden by law in a house.

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HAVING APPLIED his ruthless objectivity to private dwellings, Le Corbusier now applied it to his other great preoccupation: the city itself. Between 1922 and 1925 he made a series of visionary urban plans that would become among the most influential of the last century. He proposed an entirely new kind of city, in which the population would be concentrated in high-rise towers covering only 15 percent of the land, leaving the rest as open space. High-speed road and rail lines would connect the towers, thereby abolishing the traditional street. His Voisin Plan for Paris (1925) showed the vision at its most audacious. The vast bulk of the historical Paris was to be cleared for a methodical grid of cruciform towers, eliminating at a stroke the clutter and visual tumult that comprise most of the city's charm. Not for the first time or the last, Le Corbusier's implacable will to create went hand in hand with a certain drive to efface and destroy.

It was also accompanied by a decidedly autocratic attitude that brooked no dissent and could at times rise to comical heights. In 1930 he built the Cité de Refuge, an enlightened dormitory for the destitute of Paris, which was hermetically sealed and equipped with its own pioneering air system. The results were predictable. When the sweltering inhabitants complained that the windows could not be opened in summer, he taunted them mercilessly, suggesting that their discomfort was imaginary:

> The Cité de Refuge is not a fantasy, the Cité de Refuge is proof. You might tell me it is negative proof. To that, my response is an observation shown to be true a thousand times over: those who are closely involved become overwrought and, in discussion, they constantly confuse their psychological reactions with their physiological reactions.

Architects are well-known for their inventive excuses in cases of mechanical failure, but it was typical of Le Corbusier to deliver not excuse but abuse. One of the more amusing leitmotifs of Weber's biography concerns the decades-long effort by Le Corbusier's mother to persuade him to remedy the leaks and drafts in the family house, and his haughty insistence than any repairs would damage his reputation.

THE AUTOCRATIC strand was neither accidental nor arbitrary. Visions as comprehensive and as radical as Le Corbusier's could not be implemented without a centralized political power capable of decreeing wholesale demolitions or the mobilization of resources. From 1928 to 1930, he repeatedly traveled to Moscow, hoping to design the Palace of the Soviets. But while he did succeed in building a government office building, the Soviet pendulum was swinging away from the avant-garde toward socialist realism, and he found himself denounced by the politically compliant artist and architect El Lissitzky for bohemian individualism. Failing to win the commission for the Palace of the Soviets, he characteristically sent an angry telegram to Stalin.

But he was as willing to play the courtier with the Right as with the Left. With the fall of France in 1940, he made no attempt to flee. Instead, just two days after Pétain formed the Vichy government, he took up rooms in a hotel in the town of Vichy, where he spent much of the war. The enthusiasm for the regime that bubbles over in his letters to his mother ("Our president is a noble prince who places the respect for human values above all else") is of a piece with that for the Soviet Union a decade earlier ("I am present at the birth of a new world, built on logic and faith, which plunges me into the deepest reflections").

Some of this ardor might be written off as the prudence of one committing private thoughts to the postal system in a dictatorship. But there is no question that Le Corbusier diligently courted the Pétain government or that he purred like a kitten at the favors it showed him. The overwhelming tragedy of the war hardly roiled his self-centeredness; the letters to his mother are notable only for the cool matter-of-factness with which he relates scenes of horror. "The Jews are going through a very bad time," he wrote on October 1, 1940. "I am sometimes contrite about it. But it does seem as if their blind thirst for money had corrupted the country."

Apart from a bold project to transform Algiers into a modern metropolis, little came of Le Corbusier's Vichy work. After the war, astonishingly, he was never called to task for his ardent collaborationism (which included working on a committee with Alexis Carrel, a prominent eugenicist and champion of euthanasia). Perhaps his Swiss origins were viewed as mitigating circumstances.

IN LATE life, Le Corbusier did finally succeed in building a city. The commission came not from a dictatorship but from the young democracy of India, for which he designed Chandigarh, the capital city of the state of Punjab, including its principal public buildings.

Le Corbusier's work at Chandigarh (1951-1965), contemporary with his great church at Ronchamp, forms the capstone of his career. The weightless planarity that had once marked his buildings gave way to a more massive and thickly articulated architecture of rough concrete—*beton brut*—whose textures and tactile properties he exploited. If his aim in the 1920's had been to achieve a radical contemporaneity, he now seemed to desire an equally radical timelessness.

This was to be his final contribution to world architecture—he drowned, apparently accidentally, in 1965. But it was extraordinarily fruitful; more than a half-century after he devised them, his innovations

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in the use of concrete remain exemplary.

IT SHOULD be clear by now that Le Corbusier was a character of Shakespearean intricacy, and one who enjoyed a remarkably eventful life. To write the story of that life—to research it, to coordinate the enormous cast of characters and the overlapping timelines, and to fit everything into a coherent narrative—must have been a prodigious task. But even more than a reliable and lively chronology of events, the reader looks forward to a distinct point of view, and in this respect Nicholas Fox Weber's biography is sadly lacking.

What seems to have daunted Weber is the sheer scope of Le Corbusier's life. He divides each of his sixty chapters into a series of numbered episodes. Although there may be worse ways of organizing a book, epics cannot be written on the installment plan, and the result is an unhappily fragmented narrative that constantly jolts to a halt with little fillips like "Now even his enemies could not stop him" or "It was one plan no one else could foil." One has the feeling that the material has not yet been thoroughly digested, that the structure still remains schematic and additive, and that the long arc of unfolding events has not been grasped. Somehow this massive biography misses the man himself, even as it showers us with anecdotes about him.

Worst of all, one sometimes has the sense that Weber is not all that curious about the characters he is describing, including the principal one. Around 1909, during his vagabond years, Le Corbusier became intimate with the Swiss music critic William Ritter, who was twenty years older and homosexual. For the next two decades, the two carried on an unusually frank correspondence. This is the principal source for information about Le Corbusier's sexual life (much of which was spent in brothels), and Weber quotes liberally from it. But nowhere does he step back and speculate about the nature of this peculiar friendship, other than to say that Ritter was a "father figure who provided [Le Corbusier] with unequaled emotional companionship."

And yet, second only to his relationship with his mother, this complex and erotically charged friendship offers a crucial clue to Le Corbusier's deepest emotions. He certainly seems to have harbored a thread of ambivalence toward women, and much in his makeup was not only intense but painful (he frequently alludes to his own masochism). Surely all this has something to do with the creation of an artificial persona, complete with a pseudonym and the mask-like eyeglasses behind which he hid. Weber need not resolve the inner enigma of Le Corbusier, but one wants to know that he is at least aware of it.

Indeed, Le Corbusier's emotional life suggests insights into his architecture beyond what is revealed by stylistic analysis. His canonical works of the 1920's, which established his reputation, are distinguished above all by their quality of high-minded abstemiousness, a denial of tactile pleasure. In fashioning dwellings like ocean liners, and hoisting their rooms onto stilts, he seemed to repudiate the earth itself.

How different this is from Frank Lloyd Wright, otherwise so similar to Le Corbusier in his embrace of modern materials, love of horizontal planes and flowing space, and even in his arrogance. Unlike Le Corbusier, though, Wright sought to submerge his buildings as much as possible into the land, while for Le Corbusier the imperative seems to have been one of fastidious detachment.

By an accident of history, such fastidiousness had a wide resonance in the Europe of the 1920's. In one of the most moving passages in his memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929), the poet Robert Graves reveals how thoroughly he had been traumatized by his years in the trenches of World War I. Even long after the war, a sudden, unexpected whiff of orchids would cause him to flail frantically for his gas mask, so deeply had the terror of a gas attack burrowed itself into his nervous system.

One is tempted to see European modernism in purely intellectual and aesthetic terms, but it is worth recalling anecdotes like this so as not to overlook the deep emotional appeal it exerted. Architectural modernism in particular—sleek and hygienic in its immaculate white planes—must have offered a powerful attraction to those habituated to the squalor, vermin, and putrefaction of the war. Without the presence of such painful memories, indeed, it is unlikely Le Corbusier would have become the international figure that he did.

Nor, for all his impervious moral rectitude, was Le Corbusier himself completely rigid. After World War II, he sensed that civilization needed tangible and permanent symbols, rooted heavily in the earth (like his church at Ronchamp) and conveying a sense of deep and primal longing.

SUCH, AT any rate, are the paradoxes of a figure who created modern architecture's most objective and cerebral works but also some of its most subjective and personal. That may be why, at this late remove, and after the final skirmishes of modernism have subsided, his stature seems to grow. Although it may take another generation before he will be forgiven the crimes and sins of urban renewal committed in his name, even his blunders had a greatness about them.

That much and more become clear in another new work devoted to him: *Le Corbusier Le Grand*.* A leviathan of a book, this offers very little text but, oddly enough, greater narrative propulsion than Weber's biography. Consisting entirely of drawings, plans, photographs, and documents, *Le Corbusier Le Grand*

* Introduction by Jean-Louis Cohen. Phaidon, 768 pp., $200.00.

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gives us the architect's career in graphic form, and in chronological sequence. Simply by turning the pages one sees the quickening pace of his architectural thought and his dramatically sudden lurches in direction. The images are reproduced at large scale and with exceptional color fidelity; the watercolors made on his early travels are especially exquisite.

This immense volume—it weighs in at over twenty pounds—is a model of the lucid presentation of an architect's work. Given its quality and impressive heft, even the price is not exorbitant (although the reader might wish to invest in a small winch). Above all, it reminds us how much we still have to learn about Le Corbusier, and from him.

MUSIC

All That (White) Jazz

Terry Teachout

THE HISTORY of modern American popular music is in large measure the story of jazz, a music whose origins have long been the subject of intense controversy. Jazz is thought to have emerged in nascent form around the turn of the 20th century; by the time it was first documented on phonograph records in 1917, it had already taken recognizable shape. But what happened in between?

Not until much later did researchers begin to investigate the early development of jazz, and only in recent years has it become the subject of serious academic scholarship. Unfortunately, however, most of the key first-generation jazzmen were dead by 1940, and though a number of second-generation figures lived into the 70's and beyond, relatively few of them published memoirs or were interviewed by oral historians competent to question them in close detail about their life and work.

It says much about the problematic historiography of jazz that so much of what we know—or think we know—about it can be traced back to a single source: *Jazzmen: The Story of Hot Jazz Told in the Lives of the Men Who Created It.* This collection of historical and biographical essays, published in 1939, was the first book of its kind to be based on primary-source material, including interviews with musicians who worked in New Orleans, one of the principal birthplaces of jazz, prior to World War I. But *Jazzmen* also contained a not-inconsiderable amount of romanticized misinformation, in part because it was written by a group of young men passionately in love with an art form that was then mostly unknown to the public at large.

For most Americans, "jazz" in 1939 meant the big, polished swing bands that crisscrossed the country playing written-out arrangements of dance music, not the hot combos that improvised in big-city nightclubs. As for the rougher-edged music of blues singers like Bessie Smith and boogie-woogie pianists like Jimmy Yancey, this was even less familiar to the average record buyer. Hence the sometimes overripe flavor of *Jazzmen*, captured in the prose poem about New Orleans—"the silver and copper laugh of the prostitute, and the toothless chuckle of the old man who remembers Buddy Bolden at Bogalusa"—with which the book opens. The reader is left in little doubt of what is to follow: not a coolly realistic, fact-based account but a starry-eyed myth that tells of a group of supermen who battled poverty and racial prejudice to build an art form of their own.

NEEDLESS TO say, there is more than a grain of truth in the creation myth of jazz first promulgated in the pages of *Jazzmen*. But a myth it

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remains, and one that unfortunately has exerted a powerful influence on successive generations of journalists and scholars.[1]

Much of the power of the myth arises from the fact that it is so racially charged. Because music was one of the few professions open to blacks prior to World War II, some writers, black and white alike, became so emotionally vested in the myth and its reception that at times they simply refused to give due credit to the achievements of white jazz musicians in nearly any period. While this extreme point of view never won general acceptance, the notion persists that New Orleans blacks were the sole *creators* of jazz, and that white musicians made no major contributions to its early development. Not only is this widely believed in the black community, but a considerable number of whites also continue to accept it as true—even when presented with compelling evidence to the contrary.

The critical reception of Richard M. Sudhalter's *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945* (1999) illustrates the persistent strength of the creation myth. In addition to chronicling the achievements of such noted white artists and ensembles as Bix Beiderbecke, Bunny Berigan, the Boswell Sisters, Bud Freeman, Bobby Hackett, Benny Goodman, Miff Mole, Red Norvo, Pee Wee Russell, Artie Shaw, and Jack Teagarden, Sudhalter documented the influence they had on their black contemporaries—most of whom unhesitatingly acknowledged that, in the words of the black trumpeter Doc Cheatham, "if musicians were good, we learned from them, and they learned from us."

Yet although *Lost Chords* did win respect as an important addition to the literature of jazz, Sudhalter was savaged by certain well-placed but ill-informed critics unwilling to admit that the creation myth might be in need of radical revision. For the rest of his life—he died in September of this year—these critics treated him as an unperson. An obituary in the *Washington Post* accurately describes the reception of *Lost Chords*:

> Many critics and musicians were incensed at Sudhalter and called him the Pat Buchanan of jazz. . . . Saxophonist Branford Marsalis said the book "does not deserve the dignity of a response. It's not an argument I'm prepared to devote five minutes to."[2]

BUT THINGS have changed since 1999, and the creation myth is coming under assault by scholars, many of them young, who take an unromantic view of their subject and are prepared to test the conventional wisdom against the historical record. A prime example of this new realism is Samuel Charters's *A Trumpet Around the Corner: The Story of New Orleans Jazz*.[3]

As it happens, this is not a young man's book but the summation of the life's work of a distinguished scholar whose first book, *Jazz: New Orleans 1885-1957* (1958, rev. 1963), sought to set down all that was then known about the early years of New Orleans jazz. Charters started interviewing New Orleans musicians in 1950, at a time when it was still possible to talk to players who had been active in the first years of the 20th century. Why, then, has he returned to the subject now? As he tells us in the very first paragraph of *A Trumpet Around the Corner*, the impetus came by way of an offer from an academic press to reprint *Jazz: New Orleans*. He declined:

> I responded that . . . there had been nearly as much music in New Orleans since the book was published as in the years that the book dealt with. I also explained that in the early book I hadn't included the city's white musicians, and they had certainly played as important a role in the development of New Orleans music.

The straightforwardness of this declaration disguises its heretical nature—but not for long. Charters had indeed come to the conclusion that the white dance musicians of turn-of-the-century New Orleans contributed no less significantly to the emergence of jazz than did the black musicians who populate the creation myth, and it was in part to demonstrate this that he chose to write a wholly new book. As he explains in the introduction:

> Every musician in New Orleans in 1900, white, black, and Creole, was drawing from the same sources: the syncopated cakewalks and walk-around pieces of the minstrel-show bands, the newly popular syncopated melodies of ragtime, the disciplined music of the ever-present marching bands, the popular songs that drifted into town like seeds in the wind with the traveling vaudeville shows, and the sheet music that was found in nearly every home in each of the city's social and ethnic groups. . . . [E]ach of the musical worlds in New Orleans needed the others to create the city's distinctive musical style.

AS A RESULT of Jim Crow laws passed in the late 19th century, black and white dance musicians active in New Orleans in and after 1900 were blocked from playing together or socializing. Consequently, two different jazz dialects, one black and one white, emerged out of the musical ferment that led to the music now known as jazz.

The majority of modern-day critics judge the music of such early white ensembles as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to be derivative of and inferior to the playing of their black contemporaries. By contrast, Charters has come to regard

[1] See my "All that Jazz" (COMMENTARY, March 2007).

[2] For an example of Sudhalter's work, see his calmly authoritative review of Alyn Shipton's *A New History of Jazz* in the March 2002 COMMENTARY.

[3] University Press of Mississippi, 380 pp., $40.00.

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these groups as fully the equals of their black counterparts. For him—as well as for many early black jazzmen, prominently including Louis Armstrong—the music performed by white New Orleans players was distinct in character but comparable in both quality and influence to that played by blacks.

Why did Charters not discuss these white musicians in *Jazz: New Orleans*? His answer is again admirably straightforward: "In the 1950's many of us writing about jazz and blues reacted against the institutionalized racism we experienced in the South by placing special emphasis on the African American musical achievement."

CHARTERS IS well aware of the controversial nature of his change of heart. "I am conscious," he remarks in his introduction, "that anything I write will be considered first for its relevance to the present assumptions as to the nature and history of jazz as solely an expression of African American culture." But while the publication of Sudhalter's *Lost Chords* provoked a furious debate in the mainstream press, *A Trumpet Around the Corner* has gone all but unnoticed since it came out in April.

No doubt this is in part owing to the fact that the book was published by a small university press. But I also suspect that true believers in the old creation myth are deeply disquieted by the spectacle of so well-regarded a historian—and one whose early work contributed greatly to the consolidation of that myth—opting to break with the consensus.

Tellingly, the only review of Charters's book that I have been able to find is a cautiously skeptical notice by Jason Berry that appeared in *Gambit Weekly*, one of New Orleans's "alternative" newspapers. Berry, however, is not an academic historian but a journalist and amateur jazz scholar who is best known for his writings about sexually abusive Roman Catholic priests—and who, as it happens, also wrote skeptically about *Lost Chords* in the *New York Times Book Review* nine years ago. Unsurprisingly, his recent review contends that in challenging "the consensus of jazz as an African-American art form, [Charters] falls well short of making his case."

It remains to be seen whether others will engage with Charters's detailed claims. But even if his book is ignored in the short run, my guess is that in time its publication will come to be regarded as a key moment in the acceptance of a clearer, more nuanced narrative of jazz's early years. The ardent romanticism—and, in some cases, racial politics—of the first generation of jazz historians will give way at last to the kind of unsentimental realism that distinguishes between matters of verifiable fact and mere wishful thinking.

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Books in Review

Not Just Flat

Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How It Can Renew America

by Thomas L. Friedman

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 410 pp. $27.95

Reviewed by
Andrew Ferguson

CHAPTER ONE of Thomas L. Friedman's new book opens with an anecdote, and the anecdote Thomas L. Friedman recounts is about Thomas L. Friedman. He is attending a play in a London theater. (He tells us the time of year, the name of his companion, and the play's title, but I won't bore you with them.) During intermission he rises to stretch his legs. Instantly, he is recognized, for in this wired, globalized, interconnected world, celebrity is often transnational. It can come zooming down the aisle of a West End theater all the way from Charlie Rose's TV studio, where Friedman is a frequent guest, and from the *New York Times* newsroom, where he is a columnist.

"Are you Mr. Friedman?" a fellow playgoer asks.

"When I nodded yes," Friedman writes, "he introduced himself."

Note that Friedman does not *say* "yes"; he merely nods. It would be a mistake, a big mistake, to say that Thomas Friedman is a man of few words, but there are moments in a celebrity's life when a regal silence is the appropriate response to the solicitations of fame, and this is one of those moments apparently.

It turns out that the playgoer is a fan. Not that he agrees with Friedman all the time, of course, but one of Friedman's columns was just so good he clipped it and still keeps it handy. At first Friedman is unable to recall the column, which might suggest that his writing is so forgettable even he has difficulty recollecting it. But then he does.

The column was about the new consulate the U.S. built in Turkey a few years ago, a fortified and barricaded and heavily guarded structure. In Friedman's literary imagination, the consulate has become a symbol of America's bunkered and fretful attitude toward the rest of the world. It is also, by the way, terrifically ugly.

How ugly is it?

"It looked like a maximum security prison—without the charm."

Ba-da-bump.

"All that was missing was a moat filled with alligators . . ."

Rim shot.

". . . and a sign that said in big red letters: 'Attention! You are now approaching the U.S. consulate in Istanbul. Any sudden movements and you will be shot without warning. ALL VISITORS WELCOME.'"

Stop it. You're killing me.

"They could have filmed the Turkish prison movie *Midnight Express* there."

NO, SERIOUSLY, all hilarity aside, Friedman has a serious point to make about this ugly consulate in Istanbul, and the mere act of pondering it lofts him into hortatory extravagance: "That is not the kind of place we want America to be. That is not the kind of place we can afford America to be." Once, you see, America was a more admirable

ANDREW FERGUSON *is senior editor of the* Weekly Standard *and the author, most recently, of* Land of Lincoln: Travels in Abe's America.

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place. It was, in Friedman's phrase, "a beacon of hope." Today, "we need that America—*and we need to be that America*—more than ever." Fortunately, America can be that America again. It can "get its groove back."

Like so many Friedman sentences, these convey little or no meaning. They merely fill space until he is ready to introduce one of his patented incantatory catchphrases. When you see him back-and-forthing about "an America we could be—an America we once were—an America we can be again," prepare yourself. He is about to unload.

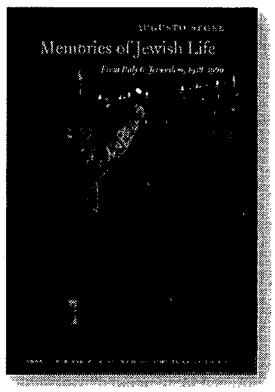
And here it comes: the world, he writes, "is getting *hot*, *flat*, *and crowded*."

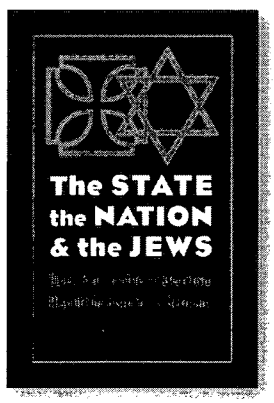
The italics are in the text and wholly unnecessary. In case we might have missed the phrase the first time, he repeats it three more times in the next 200 words. As it does constitute the title of his book, he might have presumed that his readers are already modestly familiar with it. But there is a purpose to the repetition, for "hot, flat, and crowded" is this year's version of "the world is flat."

While promoting his book of that name, Friedman invoked the words "the world is flat" with a kind of autistic frequency, in print and in interviews, and doing so helped him move more than a million units. So now he has returned, ready to hang that little trademark sign above a similar and, he hopes, equally catchy string of words, one that refers to global warming (hot), globalization (flat), and overpopulation (crowded).

The pattern has been set for the next 410 pages, give or take a few dozen hotflatandcrowdeds: anecdotes whose only point is to draw attention to the writer; jokes at the level of a middle-school talent show; relentless repetition; the piling-up of distracting detail; too-cute catchphrases; helium-filled sentences with no meaning; repetition; shameless padding; clichés; repetition; grandiosity. Plus, he repeats himself. Over and over.

We read of trends that are "tightening energy supplies, intensifying the extinction of plants and animals, deepening energy poverty, strengthening petro-dictatorship, and accelerating climate change." That sentence appears on page 5. Then on page 26 we read about "the growing demand for ever scarcer energy supplies and natural resources; a massive transfer of wealth to petro-dictators; disruptive climate change; energy poverty . . . and rapidly accelerating biodiversity loss." Then on page 37 we read about "energy supply and demand, petrodictatorship, climate change, energy poverty, and biodiversity loss." And so on, with slight variations, to page 43, 49, 173, and 403, and probably several instances I missed.





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The sloppy writing is a symptom of runaway egotism, but it is also entwined with sloppy thinking. The argument of *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is that the United States needs to be mobilized, mostly by its government, to adopt a raft of regulations, market interventions, and personal habits that will cut carbon emissions and curtail global warming. It is a sweeping program, nothing less than a reinvention of American life. And yet Friedman seems unable to fathom that his fiscal prescriptions—among other things, a gas tax and huge subsidies for windmill makers, solar panel operators, and Silicon Valley eco-investors—might entail costs that would endanger the very results he hopes to bring about.

One small example: he thinks that a dollar gas tax levied immediately after 9/11 would have pushed Americans into driving fewer miles and buying fuel-efficient cars, thus making the U.S. less dependent on foreign oil and cutting carbon emissions. But an extra dollar per gallon would also have burdened a shaky economy at a perilous moment with huge costs in every sector, from agriculture to trucking. Consumers would not have abandoned their gas guzzlers for more efficient automobiles because they would have been unable to afford it. As guzzlers age, they emit more CO_2, poisoning the air and warming the planet.

Friedman's economic reasoning is a pristine example of Frédéric Bastiat's "fallacy of the broken window," a bit of economics so elementary that even a *New York Times* op-ed columnist might be expected to know about it.

The overall effect of *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is one of astonishing intellectual vulgarity, as though the author harbored an active hostility toward any attempt at literary grace, stylistic economy, or originality of expression. Clichés leap from the page like sprites. Friedman has fallen hard for the word "sustainable," an adjective without which no popular sage can moralize properly these days, though its meaning is never explained. He likes "leadership," too. Leadership, merely by being invoked in print, works miracles. And he is far from immune to more traditional solecisms, as when he tells us that not long ago, Congress "literally gagged and blindfolded the government." (That was one big blindfold.)

Friedman is a marvelously successful instance of a classic American type, not the first in his line of work and surely not the last but one of the most formidable. He needs to be careful, though, that no policymaker follow the advice in *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. An economy reformed to Friedman's specifications would be one in which fewer and fewer people could afford to buy the books and pay the speaking fees of hucksters.

Hashemite Hash

Lion of Jordan:
The Life of King Hussein
in War and Peace

by Avi Shlaim

Knopf. 752 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Robert Satloff

In July 1989, interviewing the late King Hussein for a doctoral dissertation on the early years of his reign, I summoned up the courage to ask him to autograph a first edition of his English-language autobiography, *Uneasy Lies the Head* (1962). He signed it "with all my warm wishes and high esteem, Hussein I." For a twenty-seven-year old graduate student, life does not get much better than that.

I mention this because, as any serious student of Jordan knows, *Uneasy Lies the Head* is more artifact than source. At the time, numerous Hussein-watchers told me that it had been ghostwritten by Noel Barber, the peripatetic foreign correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, and was designed explicitly to burnish the king's image for Western audiences and Western patrons. The fact that the 42nd direct-generation descendant of the Prophet Muhammad boasted about enjoying his wife's crispy bacon for breakfast was proof enough that the book was never intended to be read by his overwhelmingly Muslim subjects.

There is nothing wrong, of course, with ghostwritten autobiographies designed to burnish one's image. For any prospective biographer, however, the key is to recognize the stylized content for what it is, mine the nuggets of historical relevance, and chuckle at the rest. On this test as on many others, Avi Shlaim falls short in *Lion of Jordan*. That is a pity, because if any Arab leader deserves a 752-page biography, it is the long-time ruler of the Hashemite kingdom.

Born in 1935 in the sleepy Transjordanian capital of Amman, Hussein was the eldest son of the eldest son of Abdullah, a leader of the Arab Revolt who was placed by the British colonial office at the helm of a resource-poor, nearly landlocked desert statelet famously created *ex nihilo* by the stroke of Churchill's pen. From his youth on, the life of Abdullah's grandson would be filled with enough adventure, tragedy, suspense, triumph, adversity, and personal complexity to fill volumes.

In 1951, he witnessed his grandfather's assassination. A year later, at the age of seventeen, he ascended to the throne when Jordan's parliament

Robert Satloff *is executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. His books include* From Abdullah to Hussein: Jordan in Transition *(1994) and* Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands *(2006).*

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voted to depose his father on account of mental instability. He inherited a country swollen with Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war with Israel, beholden to Britain for financial largess and military support, and lacking any *raison d'être* other than to serve as a buffer between larger, richer, and more powerful states. Somehow, over the course of the next half-century, Hussein achieved what few thought was possible: he survived, both physically and politically.

The story of that survival is gripping. On the personal side, Hussein's reign was a string of near-death experiences. His cousin, the king of Iraq, was butchered by coup plotters; two of his prime ministers were blown up; his beloved second wife died in a helicopter crash; and he himself was the object of several assassination attempts. On the political side, Hussein endured, as the Israeli historian Uriel Dann once noted, thanks to an ability to prioritize today's problems today, leaving tomorrow's problems for another day.

Punctuating Hussein's career was a series of seesaw decisions. In 1955, he was ready to buck the populist tide inspired by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and bring Jordan into the Baghdad Pact, an agreement struck by the British with Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey; in 1956, he did an about-face, stunning his British patrons by firing Sir John Glubb (the legendary Glubb Pasha) as commander of the Arab Legion. In 1967, he became swept up in the Nasserist tide, joined the war against Israel, and paid the price of losing East Jerusalem and the West Bank; when the next Arab-Israeli crisis arose, in 1973, he privately warned Israel of the likelihood of an Arab attack. From the 1950's through the 1970's, he was a firm American ally, denouncing Third World neutrality and accepting millions in cash support from U.S. intelligence; by 1991, the United States had been replaced as the king's principal ally by Saddam Hussein, and during the Gulf crisis he stood apart as a belligerent neutral, lashing out at America's "ferocious" and "unjust" (albeit UN-sanctioned) attack on Iraq.

From Dwight Eisenhower to Bill Clinton, from David Ben-Gurion to Benjamin Netanyahu, from Nasser to Saddam, Hussein dealt with them all—and, except for Israel's first prime minister, he did so face to face. Through all these years, Hussein was Jordan's principal export—statesmanlike, gentlemanly, valiant. These qualities, combined with flashes of ruthlessness and an uncanny streak of good fortune, were what enabled him both to secure the continued existence of his penniless principality and to die of natural causes.

A GREAT STORY—if also a well-known one. Nor, unfortunately, is there anything really new in this account by Shlaim, a professor of international relations at St. Antony's College, Oxford. Shlaim is perfectly correct that the survival of the Hashemite dynasty—against Nasserist subversion from without and Palestinian nationalism from within—was the "overarching aim" of Hussein's monarchy. He is right again to claim that Hussein's foreign policy rested on a constant search for external patrons and an equally constant balancing act between his relationship with Israel (ultimately leading to a bilateral peace agreement in 1994) and his role in an Arab system that had dealt him a weak hand.

But, with the exception of a few interesting tidbits gleaned from Hussein's decades-long secret diplomacy with Israelis, none of this would surprise anyone who had followed his career for the last half-century through the pages of the *New York Times*. For the rest, *Lion of Jordan* is workmanlike, tedious, prone to irrelevant or repetitive discursions, and never deviating far from the king's own Madison Avenue version of his life. The resulting book would be altogether unremarkable if it did not suffer from three remarkably great flaws.

THE FIRST of these flaws is Shlaim's reliance on shoddy history. Here are a few examples:

• In discussing that part of the 1978 peace accords between Egypt and Israel dealing specifically with the issue of Palestinian autonomy, Shlaim accuses Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin of outright "duplicity" in offering a three-month settlement freeze instead of the five-year cessation expected by President Jimmy Carter. In making this claim, Shlaim embraces, at face value, Carter's own version of events without even weighing the views of other American officials—like Samuel Lewis or Nicholas Veliotes—who considered the matter an honest misunderstanding.

• Writing about the run-up to the 1991 Gulf war, Shlaim heaps praise on Saddam Hussein for a "rare political master-stroke" in connecting his offer to withdraw from Kuwait with a demand for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, thereby "introducing the concept of linkage into the Middle East diplomatic lexicon." Really? The idea that the Arab-Israeli or Arab-Jewish conflict is what inspires Muslims around the world to strike out at the West—together with its corollary, that resolution of this conflict is the *sine qua non* for good relations with Arabs and Muslims—goes back to the era of Lord Balfour and T.E. Lawrence, and is as mistaken now as it was then.

• Shlaim totally botches his description of the U.S.-designed architecture that emerged from the Arab-Israeli peace conference in Madrid after the Gulf war. James Baker's "twin track" framework did not, as Shlaim contends, comprise an Israeli-Arab track and an Israeli-Palestinian track. Rather, the first track was bilateral—that is, between Israel and, respectively, the Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian-Palestini-

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an delegations—and the second was multilateral: countries from North Africa to the Gulf would participate in working groups focusing on refugees, water, environment, economic cooperation, arms control, and regional security.

And so forth. Such errors, of which many more could be cited, pertain to what is actually contained in Shlaim's book. A second and more damning flaw pertains to what is not in it.

Shlaim spent seven years researching and writing *Lion of Jordan*, three of them on leave from Oxford—surely, ample time in which to look under every rock for clues to the "real" Hussein. Why, then, among the 21 non-Jordanians interviewed for this book, is there not a *single* Arab? Here is an entire volume about the life of a man who at one time or another was the ally or adversary—or both—of Palestinians, Iraqis, Saudis, and Egyptians, yet lacking the first-hand testimony of any Palestinian, Iraqi, Saudi, or Egyptian.

It is the same with Americans. Shlaim has devoted chapter after chapter to the task of interpreting four decades' worth of U.S.-Jordanian strategic relations and diplomacy—without interviewing a single President or Vice-President, a single Senator or Congressman, a single White House or National Security Council aide, a single high-level State Department official, or a single CIA operative.

Even when among Jordanians, Shlaim seems to have been surprisingly sparse with his time. He boasts that his lone interview with Hussein opened doors in the kingdom, but interviewed none of Hussein's wives and just one of his children. Indeed, as this weighty tome moves through the later phases of Hussein's life, forcing the author to rely less on documents released from national archives and more on original research gathered through personal contact, *Lion of Jordan* actually be-

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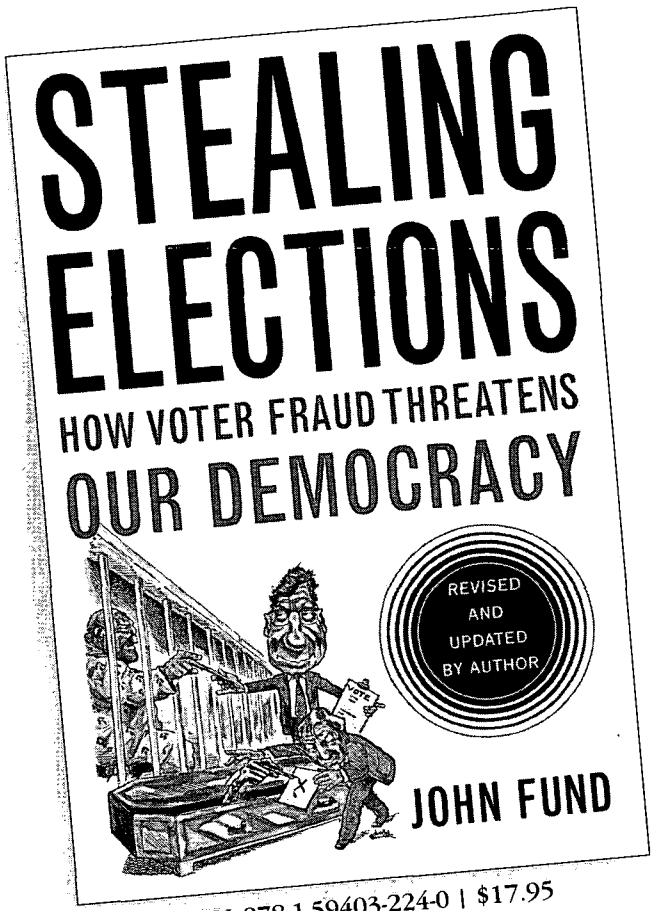

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comes lighter reading. Such is the fate of a book stunningly unburdened by fresh information.

EVEN IF Shlaim had been meticulous in his writing, and comprehensive in his research, *Lion of Jordan* would still be fatally marked by a third flaw: his blinding, unrelenting hostility to Israel. This renders Shlaim totally unfit to understand, let alone explain, the fact that Israel was the only neighbor that understood Hussein's strategic predicament, saw his success as its own, and served repeatedly as his only reliable strategic partner.

Shlaim is no newcomer to the Jordan-Israel relationship. The book for which he is best known, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (1988), notoriously contends that Hussein's grandfather Abdullah reached a secret deal with the Zionist leadership to carve up Mandate Palestine and deny the Palestinians their independence. The fact that Palestinian leaders themselves, especially the Mufti of Jerusalem, overwhelmingly rejected independence would seem to deflate the significance of any such alleged conspiracy, but Shlaim's tag of "collusion" has entered the conventional wisdom.

To the extent that *Lion of Jordan* is fixated on Hussein's private relationship with Israel, it can be viewed as a sequel to *Collusion Across the Jordan*; indeed, for Shlaim, Hussein is, in many ways, the sequel to Abdullah. This is a highly questionable proposition, one that can only have presented itself to Shlaim as a way of reconciling his manifest respect for Hussein with his vehement rejection of the king's partnership with Israel.

My own view is that the differences between Abdullah and Hussein are more important than their surface similarities. At his core, Abdullah was a risk-taker who was never satisfied with ruling a desert backwater and was always willing to gamble for more. By contrast, Hussein was profoundly conservative, a leader who spent his whole life trying to hold on to his meager inheritance and then, after losing much of it, devoting the bulk of the last thirty years to winning it back.

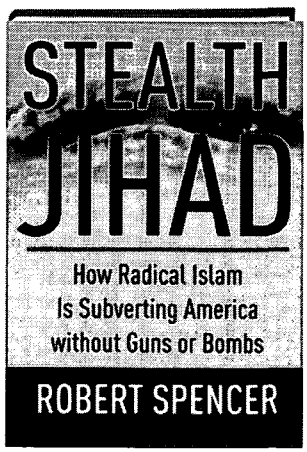
But Shlaim—a British Jew, born in Iraq, raised in an Israel that he loathes—is incapable of dispassionate analysis of this most important of Hussein's foreign relationships. At every opportunity, he revels in accusing Israel's leaders of "dishonesty," "deviousness," and "unrelenting expansionism." If Israel's Labor leaders, like Ben-Gurion and Shimon Peres, get away with tongue-lashings, Likud unfailingly elicits sheer venom. Compared with Shlaim's Begin ("dishonest and dishonorable") or Netanyahu (a "genuine charlatan"), his Saddam comes off as a scholar and a gentleman. So obsessively does Shlaim cite Likud boilerplate about a Greater Israel encompassing "two banks of the Jordan" that a reader would be forgiven for thinking that, while in power, Likud actually annexed the West Bank, transferred the Palestinians wholesale eastward, and set up an alternative Palestinian homeland in place of the Hashemites.

I SHOULD note that, during my own graduate years at St. Antony's, Shlaim, despite his fierce anti-Zionism, was always cordial to me, and in *Lion of Jordan* cites my 1994 book on Hussein twelve times. For that reason alone, I criticize him with some reluctance. But in reviewing so defective a book, nostalgia can go only so far.

True, it could be worse: if Shlaim had in fact done the work appropriate to a worthy biography of King Hussein, he might have produced a work twice as long as this one. But even then there would have been a

Fighting the Enemy Within

Stealth Jihad Already Underway in America



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Reviewed by
Joshua Muravchik

GEORGE W. BUSH has been one of the most reviled of recent Presidents, and he has poll ratings to match. But with the "surge" in Iraq giving signs of having snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, a number of observers have begun to argue that he will be rated more kindly in hindsight than he has been in real time. "There's more ferment about the Bush legacy than is sometimes acknowledged," concluded a recent summary in the *Washington Post*.

Now a book-length presentation of this point has arrived from, of all sources, the groves of British academe, where Bush is hardly more popular than, say, global warming. Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh, both of whom teach at the University of London, couch their defense of Bush in the form of a meditation on what will follow after his administration. Their surprising conclusion: "None of the key elements of the Bush Doctrine . . . will be abandoned in practice by successor administrations, whatever their rhetorical recalibrations and tactical adjustments."

Why not? Because, Lynch and Singh answer, Bush's analysis of the challenge we face from Islamic terrorists was basically correct. Like it or not, a "second cold war," no more of our choosing than the first one, has been thrust upon us. The authors prefer the term "second cold war" to "World War IV"—favored by Norman Podhoretz, R. James Woolsey, and others—because it emphasizes the ideological dimension that, in their judgment, was more in the forefront of our contest with Soviet Communism than it was in World Wars I and II. And much like its predecessor, they write, this second cold war is destined to last for a long time: "Defeating jihadist Islam ultimately requires nothing less than the reform of Islam to separate mosque and state, modernization of Arab and Muslim societies, and steps toward genuine self-government."

Hence, there is discomfiting news for all those looking forward to January 2009 as the end of the Bush years. That date, observe Lynch and Singh, "marks only the end of the beginning of an epochal struggle." What is more, they believe they can discern, through the din of reproach directed at Bush, the strains of an incipient national consensus on the matter. This emergent consensus is based on a confluence of factors: the undeniable severity of the threat; the continuance of America's global primacy; the "appeal of a distinctly American internationalism"; bipartisan support for the war on terror even if not the Iraq war; and the "vitality of American exceptionalism," in which "values as well as interests have been, and will remain, crucial components of American policies."

IN SHORT, not only will the conflict endure but so will Bush's approach to it. For one thing, "there is nothing viable with which to replace it." For another, it is "working." In saying this, Lynch and Singh are not referring to the situation in Iraq, since their book was written when our fortunes there were still at a low ebb. Instead, they have in mind the relative dearth of terror attacks against the West and the initially encouraging impact of Bush's democratization policies on the Muslim Middle East.

But even concerning Iraq, Lynch and Singh insist that the war was "not misconceived" but rather "seriously mismanaged." They cite such apparent mistakes as our deploying too few troops and disbanding the Iraqi army, and they offer an especially biting judgment of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who, in "abandoning the Powell doctrine of overwhelming force, . . . committed an error of cardinal magnitude." But they also rebut a range of other criticisms of Bush's policies in Iraq.

Wryly, Lynch and Singh mock European leftists who, "rather than organize to meet a realized and growing danger [i.e., terrorism], obsess about a predicted one [i.e., global warming]"—and who march in absurd protest against America for the sin of overthrowing a "fascist dictatorship." They also skewer the anti-Bush (and anti-Israel) polemicists Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer:

> Two of the world's most respected realist scholars have determined to condemn the war on terror on the basis of its foreign reception. Rather than unpopularity being an unfortunate byproduct of the pursuit of the national interest, it is now, by definition it appears, a negation of the national interest. . . . For liberals to pore over polling data to find empirical evidence of the unpopularity of the war on terror is not unusual. For realists to join them is a denial of the theoretical clarity of realism itself.

As for the warnings of the so-called realists that American "unilateralism" will cause others to band together against us, Lynch and Singh point out that no such coalescence has occurred, for the simple reason that the impediments to it are too great and likely to remain so.

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ALL OF this is delivered in the matter-of-fact tone that is more characteristic of British discourse than our own, and without any trace of self-consciousness or defensive hand-wringing. The thesis is one with which I feel great sympathy, although here and there I would have wished for greater precision or deeper explication.

Lynch and Singh assert, for instance, that there is no alternative to Bush's policies because those policies are working. But this is something of a non-sequitur. The world does not lack for examples of wise or prudent ideas replaced or defeated by foolish or unworkable ones. More important, the assertion that Bush's policies are indeed working could use sturdier proofs than Lynch and Singh provide. In the absence of such proofs, it might have been wiser to advance a more modest claim—namely, that no substantive alternatives to Bush's main policies have in fact been proposed, which is reason enough to give them time to demonstrate their efficacy.

A second contention needing development is the authors' assertion that success in our struggle requires the "reform of Islam." This cries out for a digression. When, if ever, has Islam been reformed in the past, and by what means and in what space of time? In the same breath, Lynch and Singh cite the need for "*steps toward* genuine self-government" (emphasis added). This would seem to imply that political change may be an even more distant goal than religious change. I would have thought the reverse. Either way, though, one wants to hear more.

Finally, even if Lynch and Singh are right that Bush's successor, whether Republican or Democrat, will find himself compelled to prosecute the second cold war along the lines set by Bush, how reassuring is that to those of us who believe in these policies? As President, Jimmy Carter found that, despite his longing to lead America away from the "inordinate fear of Communism," he could not unilaterally end the cold war, yet he waged it so half-heartedly and incompetently that we were in the process of losing until the American people replaced Carter with Ronald Reagan. This latest cold war has been visited upon us by an enemy who has already demonstrated his deadliness. If we fail to prosecute it with the utmost vigor and seriousness of purpose, we will be inviting disaster.

Still, these are relatively small complaints. To critics and decriers of the Bush doctrine, two well-versed scholars have forcefully posed the question: if not this, then what? In doing so, they have provided a most welcome tonic to the shrill election-year demagogy that has filled the American air.

"Witness"

Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism

by Paula Fredriksen

Doubleday. 528 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Kevin J. Madigan

THE PURPOSE of this book is to chart the way in which Augustine of Hippo (354-430), among the most influential thinkers in the history of the Christian Church, arrived at a "unique" and even "revolutionary" doctrine of "Jewish witness"—witness, that is, to the truth of Christianity. The author, Paula Fredriksen, is the Aurelio Professor of Scripture at Boston University; her previous books include *From Jesus to Christ* and *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. For what it is worth, she is also a convert to Orthodox Judaism.

Augustine's theology of Jewish witness can be briefly summarized. Following a well-established Christian tradition, Augustine identified Cain as a symbol of the Jews and his slain brother Abel as a prefiguration of Jesus. For their guilt in the murder of Jesus, the Jews (like Cain) had been exiled from their land, and in exile they would continue to live—in sorrow, anxiety, and servitude—until the end of time. But they were indeed to be permitted to live; this was God's will, mandated (Augustine says) by Psalm 59:12, "Slay them not, lest at any time they forget Your law; scatter them in Your might."

How was the survival of the Jews, along with the continued practice of Judaism, intended to bear witness to the truth of Christianity? First of all, their dispersion and subjugation would serve to authenticate the triumph and truth of Christianity and the displacement of the synagogue by the Church. Second, in preserving their Scriptures the Jews would unintentionally also preserve the prophecies contained within them concerning the advent of Christ, in this way proving to pagan critics or recent converts that the Church had not fabricated those prophecies. By thus serving as custodians of the books that both proved the messiahship of Christ and attested prophetically to their own blindness, the Jews had a continuing place in the drama of divine salvation.

THIS IS the background to Fredriksen's book, whose thesis is that Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of Jewish witness actually departs from traditional Christian understandings in wholly novel ways—so much so that it deserves to be seen as, in the words of her subtitle, a *defense* of Jews and Judaism. According to Fredriksen, we can trace Augustine's evolving break with tradition in the many works he wrote

KEVIN J. MADIGAN *is professor of the history of Christianity at Harvard Divinity School and co-author (with Jon D. Levenson) of* Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews *(Yale).*

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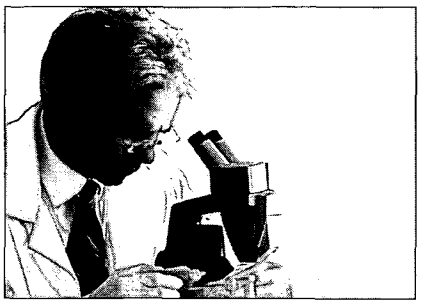

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Infectious diseases are persistent perils.

About Your Professor

Professor Anthony A. Goodman is is Adjunct Professor of Medicine at Montana State University and Affiliate Professor in the Department of Biological Structure at the University of Washington School of Medicine. He received his B.A. from Harvard College and his M.D. from Cornell Medical College.

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between the years 386 and 398. Among the better-known are *On Christian Teaching*, a manual on reading the Bible, and the *Confessions*, the great autobiographical record, addressed to God, of his journey from cultured despiser of Christianity to theologian-philosopher. But above all it is the lesser-known *Against Faustus*, a long, polemical treatise directed at the leader of the Manichees (a Christian heretical sect of which Augustine himself had once been an adherent and proselyte) that is the main focus of Fredriksen's attention, for here Augustine speaks at length about Jews, Judaism, the Hebrew Bible, and the Law.

Augustine and the Jews is organized into three parts. The first, "The Legacy of Alexander," explores the early spread of Christianity into the social and cultural world of Roman antiquity, and the multiple ways in which pagans, Jews, and Christians interacted within that world. And interact they did: even after baptism, Fredriksen emphasizes, many new Christians continued to participate in Jewish and pagan public processions, meals, and feast days.

One of the byproducts of this continued religious intercourse was a body of writing, called by the shorthand name "Against the Jews" (*adversus Iudaeos*), in which prelates of the Church condemned such Christian "Judaizing" by virulently attacking Judaism itself. This is the context in which, Fredriksen argues, the novelty of Augustine's doctrine of witness can best be understood—a task she begins to address in the second part of the book, "The Prodigal Son."

Here she traces Augustine's psychological and religious development from his days as a student in Carthage to the composition of the *Confessions*. The rich biographical material in this section is of interest to Fredriksen mainly for its relation to his thinking about Jews and Judaism. She zeroes in especially on the issues that drove him into the arms of the Manichees and then, finally, into the Church. In her view, the "axial point" was the perennially troubling issue of divine justice versus human moral freedom, and it was in pondering this issue that Augustine came to conceptualize for himself the relationship of God and the Jews.

This brings us to the third section, "God and Israel," which opens with an analysis of Faustus's attack on Catholic Christianity. Drawing heavily on *adversus Iudaeos* rhetoric, Faustus argued (as had Marcion, a 2nd-century gnostic Christian) that the Jewish god was ignorant, jealous, vengeful, immoral, and, indeed, evil; that the Law of the Jews was "fleshly" or "carnal"; that this Law had nothing to do with Christian revelation; and that therefore the Hebrew Bible should not be read by Christians.

As Fredriksen points out, "What made Faustus so dangerous was the way that he built his case by appealing to so many of the anti-Jewish attitudes and traditions of interpretation that the Manichees held in common with Augustine's own church." But Augustine resisted the temptation to accept the script handed to him. His close reading of the two Testaments had supplied him with many texts—including by the apostle Paul—praising and rejoicing in the giving of the Law and pronouncing it good (even if, for Paul, it was no longer necessary for salvation). Law and Gospel, according to Augustine, were not antinomies but, in Fredriksen's paraphrase, "two historically specific modes of a single divine initiative of redemption"; the sources of both lay in the divine will.

If the Law was good, the Jewish understanding of the Law and its enactment by Israel were also good. Temple sacrifices were good and appropriate. So was circumcision. Therefore, in Augustine's judgment, political authorities should not prevent Jews from practicing their religion. This, incidentally, stood in stark contrast to Augustine's position on the heretical North African Donatists, against whom he condoned harsh imperial repression.

All of this, Fredriksen concludes, turned the longstanding "polemical tradition" of *adversus Iudaeos* "on its head," and does indeed merit being described as a defense of Jews and Judaism.

IT IS refreshing to pick up a book that does not set out to hold Augustine responsible for the sundry ills of Western civilization. Rightly or wrongly, the bishop of Hippo has been blamed for, among other things, promulgating a view of humanity as a depraved lump of sin and of God as a moral monster, and for constructing a stark division between the body and the spirit, associating goodness, light, and Christianity with the latter and wickedness, darkness, and Judaism with the former. Fredriksen not only argues effectively against such wholesale characterizations but, in doing so, presents a model of learning and graciousness.

But is she right? Already in 1998, when she first put forward the core elements of her thesis, the historian Jeremy Cohen posed questions to which, so far as I can see, Fredriksen has not yet responded. Among these questions is whether, in fact, Augustine's doctrine of Jewish witness found its fullest expression in *Against Faustus* or, rather, in later works like *The City of God* or his harsh sermon from 428-29 titled, significantly, *Against the Jews*. Another is whether Augustine's ideas about human freedom and divine justice do indeed rest on deep reflection concerning the Jews and Judaism.

The latter may seem a side issue, but in this connection it is worth recalling something that the rabbinic scholar Louis Ginzberg wrote in an article on Augustine in the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*—namely, that Augustine's writings on the Jews "belong to the weakest and least important production of his pen." Although Ginzberg may have slightly

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A solution not accepted. Wishing to end the bloodshed and to create a stable and, hopefully, permanent solution to the decades of conflict, the U.N. decreed a partition of the country west of the Jordan River into an Arab and a Jewish state. In deference to Arab Muslim insistence that it was their "third holiest city," the city of Jerusalem, the focus of all Jewish aspirations for two millennia, was to be "internationalized." For the Jews this was bitterly disappointing. Still, in order to create their dreamed-of state, to normalize the lives of the Jewish inhabitants, and to make possible the ingathering of the Holocaust survivors, they accepted the partition plan. They declared their state, *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel – and became a nation. Forever to his credit, US President Harry Truman recognized the nascent state of Israel within minutes of its declaration of independence.

The Arabs rejected the partition proposal out of hand. Instead, six Arab armies invaded the country from all sides. They vowed to wage a war of extermination. The Jewish population of only 650,000 people was lightly armed and almost hopelessly outnumbered. But in an almost Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. They suffered horrendous casualties – about 1 per cent of the population. It was as if the United States were to lose 3 million people in a conflict. The Arabs also suffered greatly. Goaded mostly by their leaders to make room for the invading armies, about 650,000 fled the fighting. They were not accepted by their Arab brethren. They were interned and live to this day in so-called refugee camps, slum cities, in which they lead miserable and totally unproductive lives, dependent on the dole of the world. They are consumed with hatred against the Jews who, they believe, have deprived them of their patrimony.

At the end of Israel's War of Liberation, Jordan remained in possession of Judea and Samaria (which were renamed "The West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem. Egypt remained in control of the densely populated Gaza Strip.

Prosperity despite unending attacks. But Israel was not allowed to live in peace. Virtually without interruption, it was victimized by attacks from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. There were two major wars: the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Israel prevailed in both. It acquired major territories, most of which, in its never-ending quest for peace, it returned. Following these unsuccessful wars, the Palestinians subjected Israel to almost uninterrupted "intifadas," essentially one-sided civil wars, in which suicide bombings and other assorted terrors were the main weapons.

> "Then the dream could finally be fulfilled . . . Milk and Honey could indeed flow."

Despite these unending tribulations and absorbing close to 4 million migrants from all parts of the world, Israel prospered mightily. Its population is now close to 8 million. Over 1 million of them are Arabs. They are Israeli citizens, have all the rights of their fellow Jewish citizens, serve in the Knesset (Israel's parliament) and in the diplomatic corps. They are full participants in the economic prosperity that permeates Israel. Israel's product per person is on the same or higher order as that of most European countries. It is a center of science and of culture. Its industrial output encompasses some of the most advanced technology and sophisticated production in the world. Next to Canada, Israel is the most represented country on US stock exchanges. Most major high-tech companies have facilities – factories and research establishments – in Israel.

All of this is admirable, of course. But there is a flip side to this edifying story. That is the fate of the Arab descendants of those who fled Israel in the 1948 War of Liberation. Had they followed the example of the Jews and agreed to the partition decreed by the U.N., they could today be in the same advanced position as Israel, instead of the misery in which they live. Because there is no question that Israel would have been more than willing to enter into a federation with Palestine, in which citizens of both countries could peacefully partake in common prosperity.

Can that dream still come true? Of course it can! Israel has accepted virtually all of the "conditions" for reconciliation on which the Palestinians have insisted, with the sole exception of the demand for the "right of return." That "right" would swamp Israel with hundreds of thousands or even millions of Arabs. The country could not absorb them and it would with one stroke be the end of Israel as the Jewish state. Even for the thorny question of Jerusalem a compromise could be found. But, having been misled by the thuggish Arafat for decades, Arab Palestine needs a wise leader in order to finally make peace with Israel. Arab children could study at Israel's splendid universities and technical schools, instead of learning the "science" of martyrdom and the "skills" of suicide bombing. Then the dream could finally be fulfilled and peace and prosperity could be extended over all of the Promised Land. Milk and Honey could indeed flow.

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overstated the matter, it does sometimes seem that Fredriksen is determined to link almost every major turn in Augustine's thinking to his views on Jews and Judaism. But the fact is that however large the Jews loom in Augustine's writings, they do not loom nearly so large as do such other, more pressing problems as the one presented by Christian heretics. In his capacity as bishop, Augustine could hardly have had Jews and Judaism consistently on his mind, or even close to the top of his agenda.

MORE WORRISOME than any of this, however, is that much of the literary evidence adduced by Fredriksen actually seems to undermine her portrait of Augustine as a defender of Jewish practice and theology. This is especially true of the chapter in which she lays out the many good things he says about the Law and the rituals it prescribes—and where she is also too honest a scholar to omit the offensive things he says: that after the coming of Jesus the Law is no longer necessary for salvation; that Christ removed the "veil" obscuring the truest meaning of the Law; that the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets themselves, enlightened as they were by divine revelation, perceived the ultimate (Christological) significance of the Law; and that the reason Temple sacrifices were commanded as a central ritual in ancient Israel is that they foretold the sacrifice on the cross of God's incarnate son.

Fredriksen is surely right to assert that Augustine justifies the commandment of Temple sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. But she is no less right that he does so in order "to defend the incarnation"—in my view, *only* to defend the incarnation. And that is not to speak of the many other traditional elements of Christian teaching concerning Jews and Judaism that Augustine preserves in his own doctrine and that can only be regarded as downright hostile or insulting. Thus, Augustine assumes that Jesus was murdered by the Jews and that for this reason they did and should live in subservience and misery, displaced from their homeland. No longer God's beloved people, they exist solely to vindicate the truth of the new religion that has replaced them.

For Augustine, as Fredriksen herself concedes, "Israel, all unknowing," has become "the servant of the Church." It is very hard to square this with the notion that the bishop of Hippo was a defender of the Jews.

IN HER prologue, Fredriksen asserts that in stipulating the continued value of the Jewish "witness," Augustine's doctrine may well have been responsible for saving Jewish lives in the Second Crusade. About this, she is almost certainly correct—although one is immediately compelled to add that the same doctrine had failed to save Jewish lives in earlier times. To cite just one example: Agobard, bishop of Lyon in the 9th century, very likely tried to baptize Jewish children by force, thus violating one of Augustine's central teachings as well as a royal edict against the practice. Apparently unimpressed by or perhaps unaware of the influence of the Augustinian theology of witness, Agobard claimed that the edict was "contrary to the teaching of the Church."

Taking a longer view, one might even speculate that the doctrine of Jewish witness, instead of having had a beneficial effect, made Judaism more subservient, and Jews more vulnerable, than Augustine himself intended. In secularized form, it might even be seen as exercising its prejudicial, not to say lethal, influence as late as the 19th and 20th centuries. For was not the rise of modern anti-Semitism connected in part to Gentile resentment of the fact that Jews seemed to be flourishing in European societies, in flagrant contradiction of the centuries-old understanding that they should be failing and miserable?

It is a tribute to Paula Fredriksen's impressive and thought-provoking book that it elicits such difficult and still-sensitive lines of speculation. For this alone, we owe her appreciation and gratitude.

See No Jihad

The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals

by Jane Mayer

Doubleday. 392 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Clifford D. May

IN *The Dark Side*, the investigative journalist Jane Mayer presents a broadside, perhaps the harshest yet offered, against the Bush administration's conduct of the war on terror. Her bill of indictment is comprehensive.

After the shock of 9/11, Mayer writes, our government "panicked," precipitously deciding to "transform the fight against terrorism from a criminal-justice matter to a full-fledged military war." In prosecuting this war, the administration, led by Vice President Dick Cheney and a few gung-ho advisers, assumed executive powers that were historically and legally unprecedented, and then used them in horrifying ways.

Cheney, Mayer writes, "believed it was an urgent matter of life and death to not just solve crimes but instead to preempt them before they were committed." This meant not only confronting regimes and known terrorists who constituted a threat to the United States, as enunciated in the Bush Doctrine, but also confronting individuals who

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were merely thought to be connected to terrorism.

In the case of such terror suspects, according to Mayer, the administration felt "it had no time to establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." And so "previously illegal practices" were authorized, including eavesdropping on communications abroad, and killing, capturing, and detaining individuals outside the conventional processes of the criminal-justice system. "Simply by designating the suspects 'enemy combatants,'" charges Mayer, "the President could suspend the ancient writ of habeas corpus that guarantees a person the right to challenge his imprisonment in front of a fair and independent authority."

Nor was that all. In Mayer's telling, the administration also permitted government agents to "physically and psychologically torment U.S.-held captives," thereby making "torture the law of the land in all but name" and turning the United States into "the first nation ever to authorize violations of the Geneva Convention." Under this self-granted dispensation, the U.S. government has subjected untold numbers of innocent Muslims to treatment "reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition," sacrificed America's "cherished values," and destroyed our moral standing in the world.

None of these charges is new. Each has been leveled for some time by administration critics. But Mayer has assembled them together in what amounts to a relentless closing summary for the prosecution. Throughout, in the manner of a prosecuting attorney, she declines to engage with opposing facts or counterarguments. This gives *The Dark Side* its peculiarly hermetic quality: Mayer is not only preaching to the choir but conducting it and singing all of the solo parts at the same time.

The Dark Side opens with John Quincy Adams's famous admonition to Americans not to go "abroad in search of monsters to destroy"—an apposite quotation, perhaps, were it not for the revelation on September 11 that the terrorist threat to the United States was not a fantasy, as Adams's words suggest. Nor did we go in search of these particular monsters. On that day the monsters came to us, their arrival having been preceded by an escalating series of attacks on Americans over the years: Beirut in 1983, the World Trade Center in 1993, Khobar Towers in 1996, U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the *U.S.S. Cole* in 2000, to name just a few.

For Mayer, it is axiomatic that the aftermath of September 11, and what it revealed about the flaws in the American security apparatus that made the jihadist attack possible, did not necessitate any new framework for thinking about the protection of the United States from a new form of foreign aggression. She is outraged that Bush and Cheney would even presume to ask their legal advisers to study the latitude available to them in fighting the terrorists—to determine which practices would be permissible and which would fall into a gray area requiring new laws and policies.

Instead, these advisers are presented here in monochrome—all black. David Addington, Cheney's legal counsel, is "a loner" with "rigidly conservative views" who "seemed to revel in being anonymous and abstemious," so indifferent to the opinions of right-thinking people that, according to a colleague, he "didn't care about advancement in the Washington world." Another administration attorney, deputy White House counsel Timothy Flanigan, is a "Mormon and anti-abortion activist" who was "involved in the politically divisive legal investigation of Bill Clinton's sex life." John Yoo, who ran the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice, is said by unnamed critics to have "fictionaliz[ed] the founding history of the country." (How he did so is not explained.)

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By contrast, the administration's critics are portrayed without blemish. Alberto Mora, a Navy lawyer who charged wrongdoing at Guantanamo, is "a courtly and engaging man, with neatly trimmed silver hair, warm brown eyes, and the ability to both listen well and to lead." Michael Ratner, a Columbia University law professor who represented a number of Guantanamo detainees, is "a graying pillar of America's left-wing legal bar."

Even John Walker Lindh, the so-called American Taliban who was picked up by U.S. military in Afghanistan, is portrayed as a man who won friends among the Taliban for his skill at "cooking macaroni." To his misfortune, Lindh "came to the region to study Arabic," but "got caught up in a religious cause." Mayer seems unaware that the closest Arabic-speaking area to Afghanistan is many hundreds of miles to the West. Could Lindh have been in Afghanistan for other reasons?

When she discusses the protections of the Geneva Convention, Mayer shows no familiarity with the argument, put forth most plainly by Andrew C. McCarthy, that al Qaeda's status as a stateless network denies it the right to be considered a "high contracting party" to the Convention and that therefore its operatives have "no general or presumed claim on the treaty's protections."

In Mayer's view, al-Qaeda terrorists fall into the same category as, say, members of the French Resistance in World War II; they, too, according to her, might have been considered "non-uniformed 'unlawful' combatants." Therefore, Americans are obliged never, under any circumstances, to subject al-Qaeda members to "physical or moral coercion," even in a "ticking-time-bomb" scenario when it is known that an attack is imminent.

Mayer has no patience with those who argue that a line can be drawn between torture and "stress and duress": i.e., interrogation methods that fall short of torture and are not employed for the amusement of government agents or to coerce confessions but are, rather, applied to elicit information that may save the lives of civilians targeted by terrorist plots. No rational person would dispute that a hot poker through the eye constitutes torture and should be taboo. But a few days of sleep deprivation? Inflicting boredom on a subject to make him more talkative? Isolating him and causing him to feel dependent on his captors?

IF MAYER had raised such questions and sought to answer them in a dispassionate and thorough manner, *The Dark Side* might have been something other than a rehearsal of the most conventional of liberal clichés. And loose clichés at that: Mayer writes blithely, for example, that there has been "nearly universal bipartisan acceptance outside of the Bush administration that Guantanamo should be shut down."

What "universal bipartisan acceptance" is that, exactly? Without any apparent sense of contradiction, Mayer herself notes on the very next page that "a bill to close Guantanamo was defeated when the Senate voted overwhelmingly (94-3) against transferring the detainees to prisons in the United States." Having written herself into this corner, she then wishes her way out of it by asserting as fact that every one of those 94 votes was cast for a dishonorable reason: "the fear of appearing 'soft' on terrorism."

Contrary to Mayer, scholars and lawyers across the political spectrum have argued that the conflict in which America is now engaged is unique and requires a new legislative framework—new rules about spying, detention, interrogation, and the use of lethal force; perhaps new institutions as well. For Mayer, all such talk is a function of 9/11-induced panic. To her, what has transpired in the last seven years is not "a battle for America's security" but "a battle for the country's soul."

In this connection, Mayer approvingly quotes Eric Haseltine, a former adviser to the Director of National Intelligence, who judges that "our greatest sin in the eyes of Muslims was not invading the Middle East, or even our support of Israel: our greatest sin was robbing Muslims of hope." And how do we give back to Muslims the hope we have allegedly purloined? By returning to pre-9/11 thinking; by recasting the war on terror as a criminal-justice matter alone; and by extending American constitutional protections to foreign terrorists on foreign soil.

According to Mayer, "it is hard to know" whether the Bush administration's successful avoidance of a second attack on American soil since 2001 "represents the vanquishing of new credible threats, or rather the absence of any." If, over the years ahead, the message of this book should come to be embraced by Washington, we may find out.

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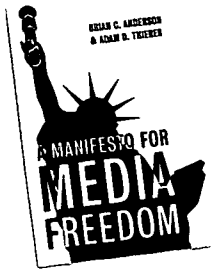

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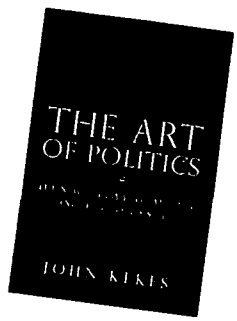

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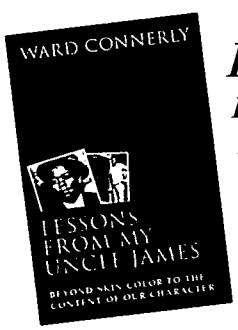

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